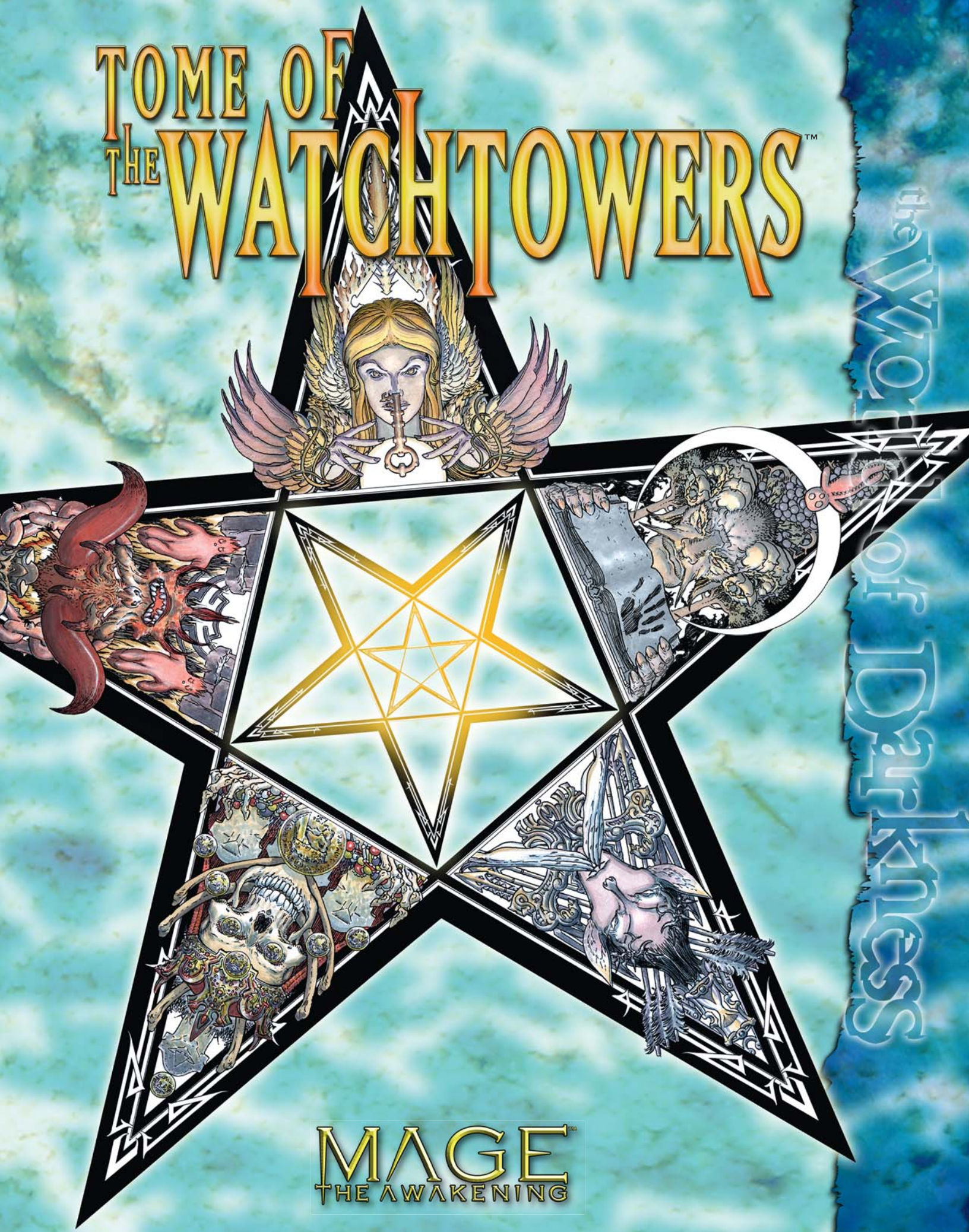
Tome of the Watchtowers™



MAGE™
THE AWAKENING

the World of Darkness

We can see the symbols. We can know that we have shared some vision, some common experience. We have seen and felt the towers, each in our own way, without truly understanding them. How can we know when we've unearthed all the meaning beneath them?

Don't fool yourself into thinking we can begin after we unravel the symbols. There's nothing after the symbols — they aren't obstacles to our purpose, they are the purpose.

— Amelia Jubile, Mysterium philosopher on the Path of Ecstasy

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- Information on Sanctums, rituals and spells to make any character a unique exemplar of any Path.
- A new Legacy for each Path, plus the introduction of Dedications — new practices any wizard can perform to summon precious Mana.

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MAGE™ THE AWAKENING

DOORWAYS



"The attack will come at sunrise," Johnny Silver mumbled as he stood at the window, pulling back the curtain just enough to look out from two stories up at the deserted alley below. He ran his fingers nervously through his prematurely white hair, pushing it back off his forehead for the fifth time in as many minutes. "Master Greyre saw it," Johnny Silver said. "That's good enough for me."

"Do you really think we can survive an entire army of Banishers?" Lugh spoke for the first time since the rest of the order had fled, taking the sanctum's precious treasures with them to safety. He stood with his back to the only door into the room, the door they would have to hold for as long as they could.

"I wouldn't call it an army, exactly," Johnny Silver said, letting the curtain fall softly to its original position and turning around to face the center of the room. "It's more like three or four actual Banishers and a whole shitload of their zombies."

"Don't you mean 'enlightened' disciples?" Tamarind opened her startlingly blue eyes, giving up on meditating for the moment. "They have minds, after all."

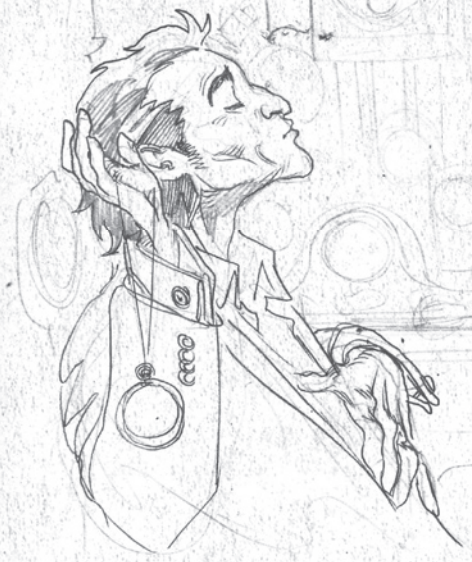
"Yeah, but they don't use them," Johnny Silver maintained. "They just follow orders and think they're wiping out an evil menace."

"Terrorists," Jubal said. "They think we're terrorists, and they're doing the world a favor."

Ocelot shook her head. "I'd never blindly follow orders," she said.

"That's because you're hardwired for independence," Lugh said.

"So, what are we doing here, blindly following orders to `hold the line?'" Lugh asked. He rubbed a hand across his newly shaven head, still amused by the feeling of bared scalp. "I know someone has to do it, but did any of us actually question why we were chosen?"



"I thought it was obvious," Jubal said. In the room's fading light, his dark skin and dark clothing faded into the shadows as he stood up. His guns were no longer in sight. "We're the sacrificial lambs. We die so the others can escape. So that the Council's knowledge and treasures can safely disappear."

"So what's the lesson we're supposed to draw from this?" Lugh asked. "That we're either the Free Council's expendables?"

"I don't like to think of us as sacrificial anythings," Ocelot said. "We deserve better than that!"

"Well, we've got all night to come up with a plan," Johnny Silver remarked.

Conversation stopped for a while as the day wore on into evening and shadows filled the room. Around the five young mages, the walls of the sanctum echoed with emptiness.

Ocelot reached into her backpack that rested in a corner of the room and pulled out some power bars. She handed them around, not bothering to ask if anyone was hungry. They shared bottled water and cans of green tea.

"I have a question for all of us," Tamarind announced. "Do you think we were left behind to buy time for the others to get away safely because we're expendable? Or do you think that we were asked to do this because our teachers thought we could do something effective?

A few moments of silence passed.

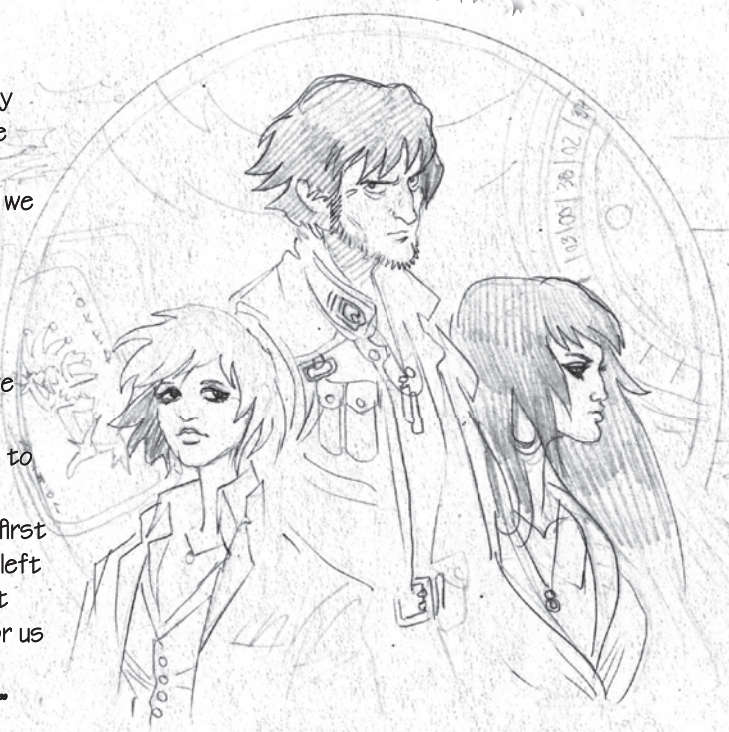
"I have to believe there was a reason Master Greyre told us when the attack would come," Johnny Silver said, "and I don't think it was so we could write our wills."

"I agree," Jubal said. "I think we have this time to do something specific."

"I see where this is going," Lugh said. For the first time since the other Free Council members had left the sanctum, he sounded excited about the next few hours. "You think there's something here for us to do," he said.

"Or to find," Johnny Silver added. "Or to learn."

"Do you think they hid something for us?" Ocelot asked. The small fine hairs on the back of her neck and on her arms stood up as she felt a ripple of excitement course through her. She could smell a hunt.





"It could take all night and then some to cover the entire place," Ocelot observed. "We don't have enough information — unless," she paused, her whole body becoming alert as if she were a jungle cat suddenly catching the scent of prey. "Unless we have what we need to start looking and just don't know it."

Johnny Silver closed his eyes and leaned his head against the wall next to the window. "Master Greyre said that I and a few others had been chosen to stay behind and delay the attackers so he and the other mages could take the sanctum's treasures to safety. Then he told me the result of his foreseeing — that the attack would come at sunrise — and then he said we should all stay in the library, that it was the most defensible room in the building and that we had a better chance there than anywhere else." He opened his eyes again and looked around. "That last part didn't sound like a prophecy, though," he added. "It was just Master Greyre talking tactics."

"That's all you remember?" Jubal asked.

"That's all he said," Johnny Silver replied. "I looked back and made sure."

"Master Coroliani just said to stay in the library with the others," said Tamarind. "That my perspective might prove useful to everyone," she blushed and dropped her gaze to the floor. "I assumed he meant that because I study death I could— "

"— help us deal with our own imminent passing?" Lugh supplied, a smile barely discernable on his face.

"Maybe I was wrong," she said, lifting her head to look around at her fellow defenders.

"Master Hiberniam said something similar to me, come to think of it," Lugh said. "He gave me one of his 'I'm going to say something important' looks and then said 'Wait in the library for the enemy to come to you. You'll have the advantage if you do.' But I remember thinking at the time that any place we chose would give us that advantage." He paused. "Maybe not."

"Mater Lyonessa told me to stay with you all in the library, no matter how much I wanted to 'take to the hunt.' She said for me to remember that everything, even power, has a scent. I'm still trying to figure that one out," she admitted.

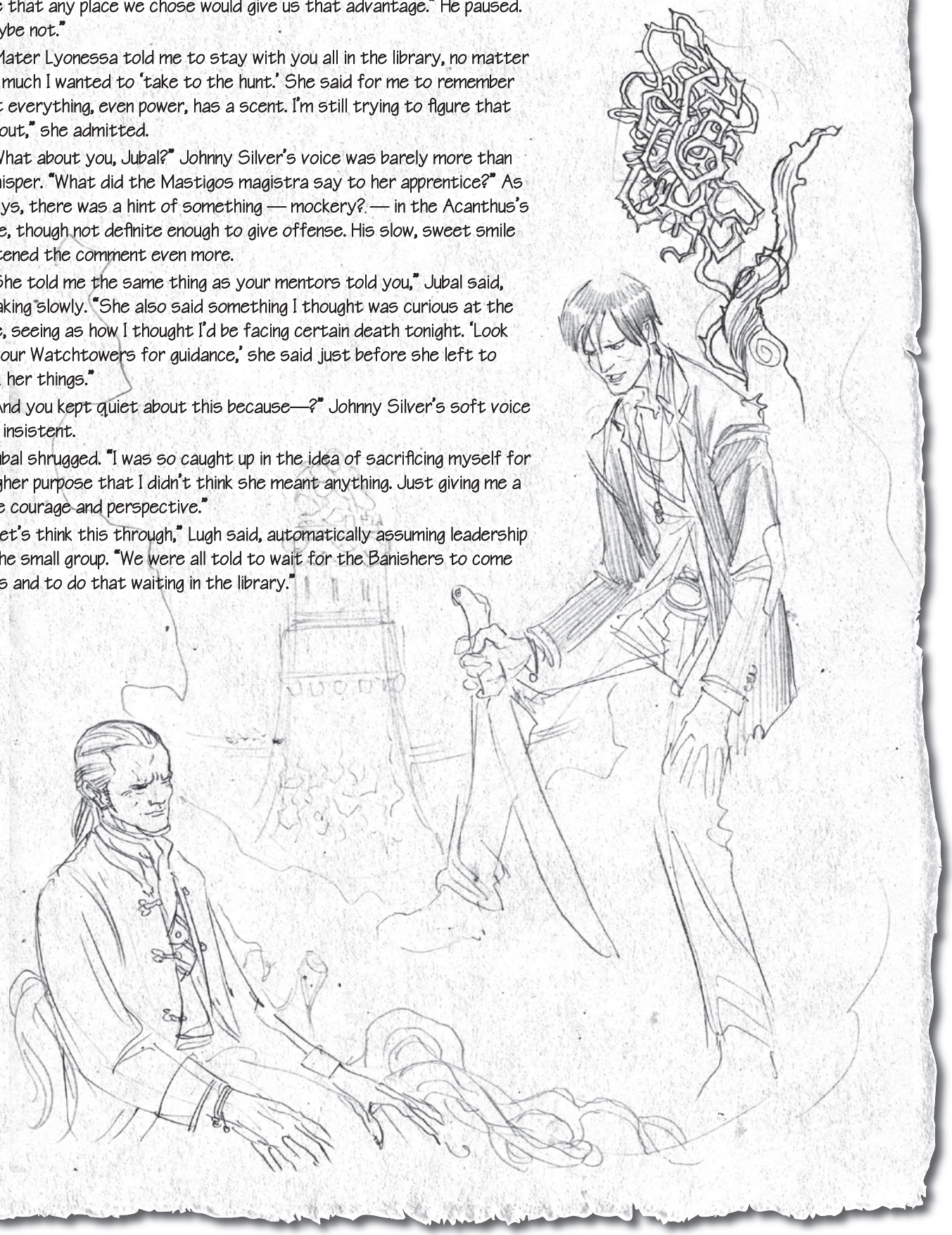
"What about you, Jubal?" Johnny Silver's voice was barely more than a whisper. "What did the Mastigos magistra say to her apprentice?" As always, there was a hint of something — mockery? — in the Acanthus's voice, though not definite enough to give offense. His slow, sweet smile softened the comment even more.

"She told me the same thing as your mentors told you," Jubal said, speaking slowly. "She also said something I thought was curious at the time, seeing as how I thought I'd be facing certain death tonight. 'Look to your Watchtowers for guidance,' she said just before she left to pack her things."

"And you kept quiet about this because—?" Johnny Silver's soft voice was insistent.

Jubal shrugged. "I was so caught up in the idea of sacrificing myself for a higher purpose that I didn't think she meant anything. Just giving me a little courage and perspective."

"Let's think this through," Lugh said, automatically assuming leadership of the small group. "We were all told to wait for the Banishers to come to us and to do that waiting in the library."



"Now we're here in an empty room," Tamarind said. "Emptiness is another symbol for death."

"Maybe not empty," Johnny Silver said. "Maybe it's a clean slate."

"That would make it a beginning," Ocelot said eagerly.

"An evener of the odds," Johnny Silver added.

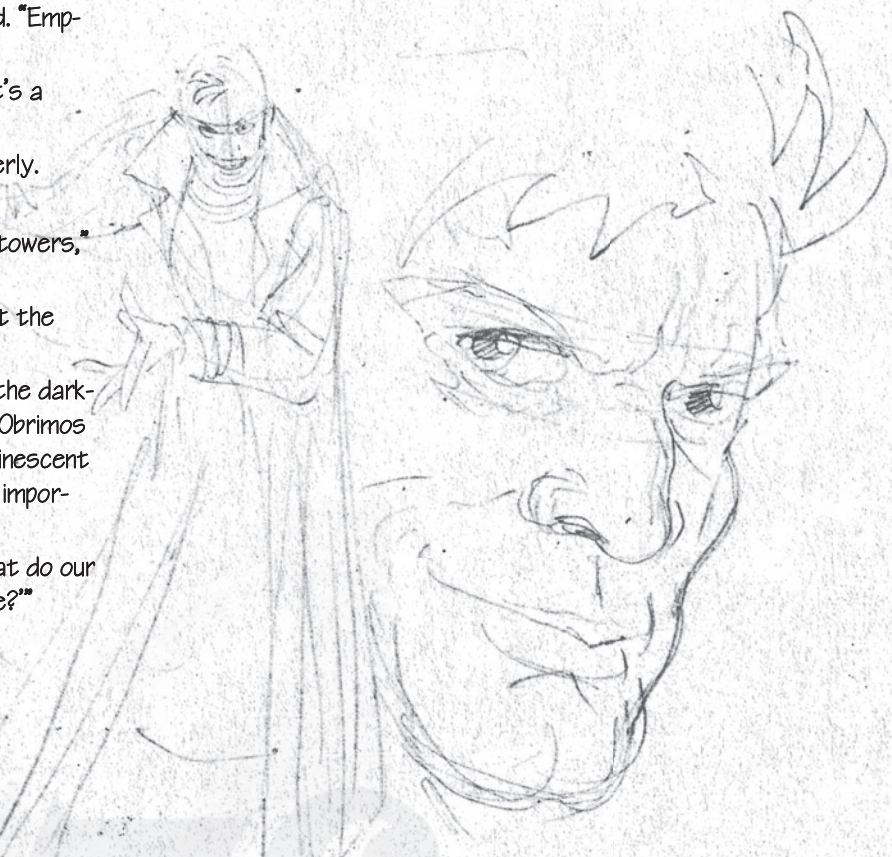
"Let's go back to the comment about the Watchtowers," Lugh said.

"Answers!" Ocelot said, "We don't even know what the questions are."

"Then we'll find the questions first," Lugh said. In the darkness, lit only by the full moon just rising, the young Obrimos mage seemed to glow, his body surrounded by a luminescent aura. "I think the first question is 'why is this room important?'"

"The second question, then," Jubal added, "is 'what do our Watchtower experiences have to do with being here?'"





"For me, the question is 'why us?'" Tamarind said.

"I'll take a stab at that," Johnny Silver said. "I'm Acanthus. You're Moros." He indicated Tamarind with a nod of his head. "Jubal is Mastigos, Ocelot is Thyrsus and Lugh is Obrimos. Together we make up a mini-Consilium of mages."

"So that answers the last question," Ocelot said. "Since we're working backwards, why don't we compare our Watchtower experiences to see if we can answer the second question?"

"That's always been a very personal experience," Lugh said.

"This isn't one of those usual times," Johnny Silver said. "I'll start if no one else wants to. If we're going to face death together, we should at least know something about each other."

"Fair enough," Tamarind responded. "You start and then I'll go."

Johnny Silver remained in his place next to the window, letting the wall support him and turning his head so that he could just see the street without moving the blinds. His audience waited patiently for him to focus his thoughts.

"I used to play in a traditional folk band. We did the old ballads, songs like 'The Elf Knight' and 'Tamlin' and 'The Battle of Harlaw.' I played flute and pennywhistle, uillean pipes. We were pretty good, but not good enough to play anything larger than small clubs and coffee houses.

"I was driving home from a gig one night. It had been raining and my car hit a wet spot and hydroplaned off the side of the road. It flipped and rolled over a couple of times, settling upside down inside a bunch of trees and bushes. The seat belt held me in and

kept me alive during the roll down the hill, but I could feel I was hurt. I couldn't make my legs move and I was having a hard time breathing. I remember thinking the car was pretty well hidden by all the greenery and wondering what the odds were that anyone would find me before I either bled to death or died of exposure. I must have passed out about then, because the next thing I was aware of was that I was hanging upside down in the middle of a huge mass of thorns. I knew I had to get past them or I'd die. My hands were empty and although I had a baldric across my chest — the residual image of my seat belt, I guess — I had no sword. I started clawing at the brush, ripping the thorns away with my bare hands.

"Finally, I broke through and found myself standing at the base of a tower that glowed silver from the moonlight shining down on it. I saw names inscribed and bloody all over the outside of the tower and, I think, inside, too. I half fell inside the tower and dragged myself to a spot just inside the door. My hands were covered in blood so I used my finger to write my name. Something… exploded in my head and I heard a flute. I opened my eyes just as someone said, 'Look at all those tiny cuts all over him. Looks like he lost a war with a thorn bush.' I think I laughed, but the effort put me out again. The next time I awoke, I was in a hospital bed and Master Greyre was talking to me, telling me that I was going to come with him to start a new life."

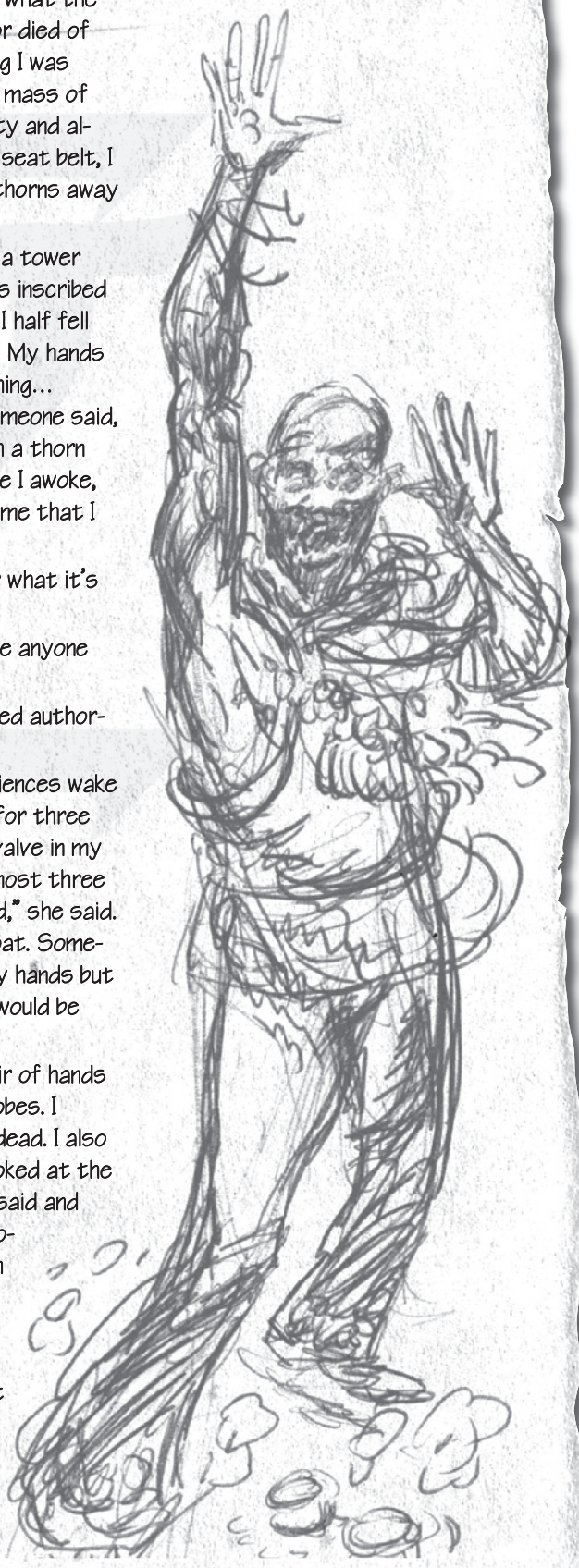
Johnny Silver paused for a few heartbeats. "That's my story, for what it's worth."

"So what does that tell us?" Lugh asked, but Jubal spoke up before anyone could answer him.

"Let's just hear everyone's stories first," Jubal said, an unexpected authority creeping into his voice.

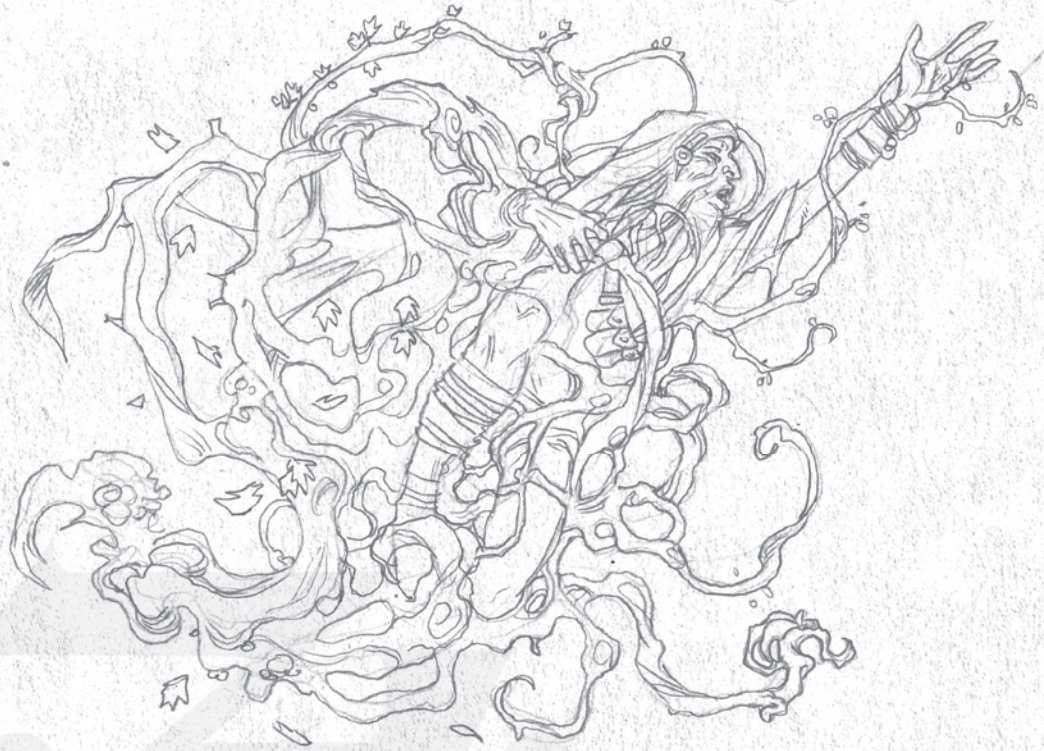
"Obviously Moros aren't the only ones who have near-death experiences wake us up," Tamarind said, smiling at Johnny Silver. "I was clinically dead for three minutes. A couple of years ago, I needed surgery to repair a faulty valve in my heart. During the surgery, my heart stopped. I coded and it took almost three minutes for them to bring me back. Three minutes in the Fallen World," she said. "It was considerably more than that in Stygia. I found myself in a boat. Something heavy weighed down my eyes. I tried to touch my face with my hands but I couldn't move my arms. I heard a voice telling me to wait, that 'all would be explained' when the boat reached shore.

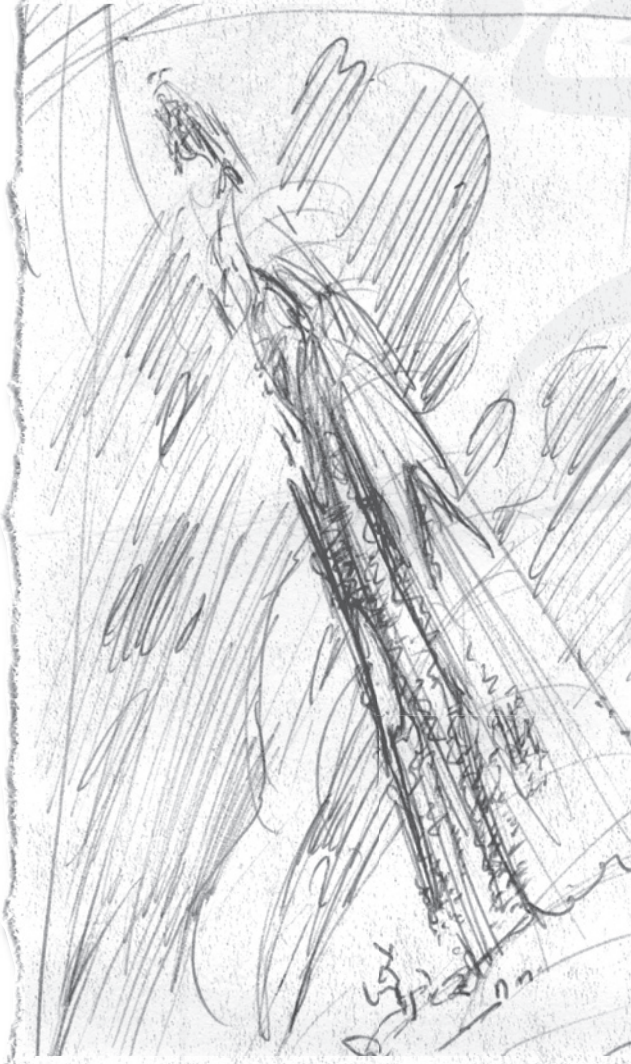
"Eventually, we stopped and the weight lifted from my eyes. A pair of hands helped me out of the boat and I looked upon a man wrapped in dark robes. I couldn't see his face. I figured he was the Ferryman and that I was dead. I also knew that the weight on my eyes were the coins used to pay. He looked at the coins and then gave them back to me. 'You will need them again,' he said and pointed me toward a massive tower that looked like lead. I walked toward it, feeling heavier and heavier as I approached. I had to crawl on hands and knees for the last few steps. Inside, I heard a voice that sounded both inside my head and outside my body. 'Speak your burdens and be delivered,' the voice said. I started listing everything I had done, the good and the bad, from the time of my earliest memories. As I named each one off, I felt it lifted away from me. By the time I reached my surgery, I felt light as a feather. I knew then that I had to sign my name into a book on a pedestal inside the door. It looked like a guest book at a funeral home to me. My — I remember my hand shook when I signed my name.



"As soon as I finished, I felt the coins whisked out of my hands and I was falling through a tunnel that ended up in the intensive care recovery area. And that's my version of Awakening."

"I'll go next," Ocelot offered. "My story is short. Last summer I lived with my dad on the reservation. I talked with some of the tribe's wise men and women about how I wanted to go on a vision quest and how I wanted to be closer to my Indian half. They helped me prepare myself mentally and physically for the quest and when I felt ready, I went to the canyons near the rez and just started walking. I don't know how long I walked, without sleep, without food, without stopping.





"Suddenly, I wasn't in the canyons anymore. I was in a jungle and directly in front of me was a cave. I went inside and there was an enormous book carved of stone. An ocelot was curled up asleep near the book and when I entered, it woke up and leapt for me. Before I could stop it — and I really didn't try to stop it — the ocelot's body collided and... merged with mine. I looked at my hands and they were huge paws. Sharp claws. I used the claws to scratch my name in the book. I saw that the cave had a very high ceiling — more like a tower inside than a cave.

"All at once, I was standing in the canyon, surrounded by the tribe's wise men and women. They told me they had all heard a voice telling them that I had found my vision and they were to bring me to one to teach me. That's how I hooked up with Master Lyonessa."

"I had a nightmare," said Jubal. "One that changed my life. I was going to law school. Had it all planned out. I was going to be a high-powered trial lawyer and make money defending hot-shot corporate criminals. I wanted a big house, a tres cool car, an arm-candy wife, vacations in Vegas and Monaco — all of it. Then I had my nightmare. It was just after exam week and I was exhausted from pulling all-nighters. I didn't so much fall asleep as, uh, drop into a huge well of darkness. Everything I thought I wanted, I had and as I went through the life I'd planned out for myself, I saw it for the series of petty horrors it was. Getting rich men and women off the hook was gutting my soul, my wife was cheating on me and I was up to my ass in gambling debts. Someone sent some fucking thug to kill me, or something, and I took off. I guess I took refuge in an abandoned carnival, like something out of the movies. There was a huge iron building in the center.



"Without thinking, I ran inside, only to have the door clang shut behind me. I looked around and felt a wave of nausea wash over me. None of the proportions of the room I was in made any sense. It made Escher look normal. I threw up a lot, looked around and saw all these names inscribed on the iron walls. There was a glove made of iron mesh on the floor and I put it on. It started heating up, got red hot. I wanted to scream, but it hurt so much I couldn't breathe. I used the, uh, the gauntlet as a stylus and burnt my name in the wall. When I'd finished that, it cooled down almost immediately. I felt cleansed and changed, as if I'd just woken up. All I had to do was leave the building by jumping across a chasm that opened up in front of the door. I knew if I miscalculated, I'd fall into this bottomless pit. But I made it. As you can see."

"I'm seeing a pattern," Johnny Silver whispered. "Lugh? You're the last to speak."

"I think I know what you mean," Lugh said to Johnny Silver. "My dad was an evangelical minister. He wanted me to follow in his footsteps, but I couldn't quite buy the whole package. I believed in God and redemption, but I didn't think you got there by paying money to churches and claiming you had a lock on salvation. One thing I did learn from my dad was the habit of nightly prayer. One night I remember praying that God would show me what to do with my life. That was when I heard the carolers outside my window. But it was mid-summer. I looked out and saw this chorus of glowing beings — angels, I thought. I climbed out my window and the angels walked me to this big tower in the woods that looked as if it were made of gold. They handed me a golden key, and I put it in the lock. The door opened and before me, a book hung, floating in the air. I traced my name in the air, in front of the book and... I felt blessed. I knew I had another path to follow than my father's. My teacher found me the next day."

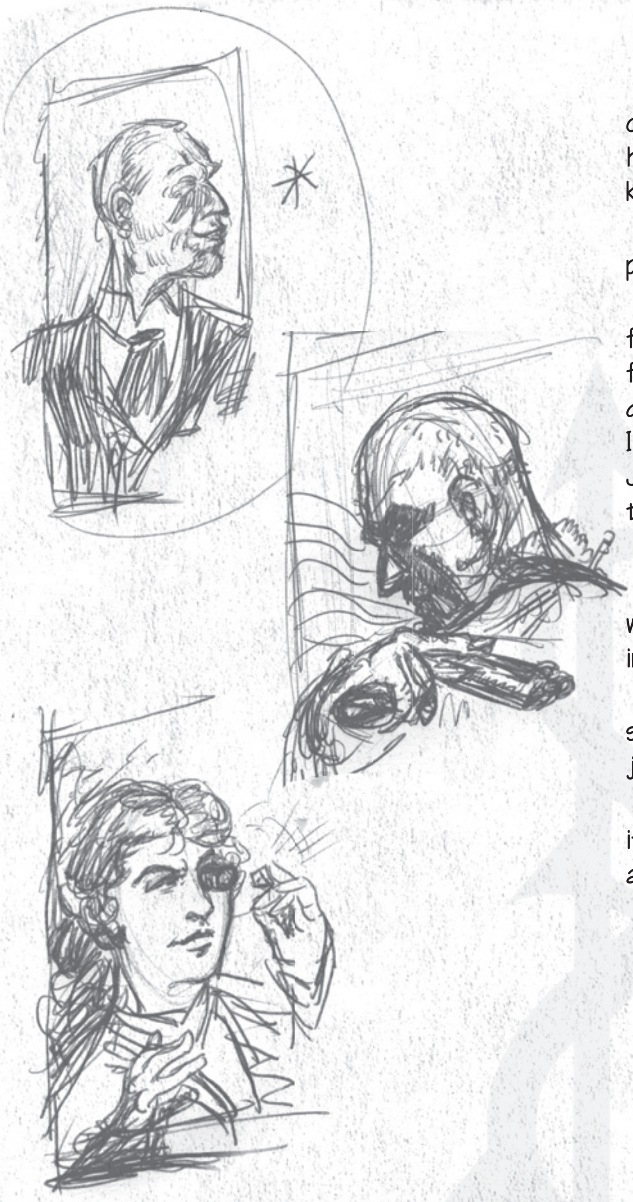
"Doors," Tamarind said. "Our stories all focused on doors or entries."

"And the space just inside the doors," Lugh added. "There's something here we need to find. Something in this empty room.

The room went quiet as they each scanned the room, some squinting or leaning in close to the walls. Ocelot sniffed the air. Tamarind ran her hands over the walls.

"Here, at the baseboard by the door, there's something. Something... spiritual. It's not living — more like a magically dedicated object." She felt along the baseboard itself. "It feels like a keyhole."





"And here's the key!" Lugh said, staring at the opposite side of the door. "There's definitely a lot of Prime focused right here. He scraped away at the wallpaper to reveal a small golden key.

"Well," Tamarind said, "let's use the key and see what happens," Tamarind said.

Lugh turned the key inside the keyhole and a section of floorboards popped like a car hood. He reached down into the floor and pulled up a long, thin object wrapped in silk. Inside was a delicately carved wooden flute, black with silver stops. "I guess I know who to give this to," he said, offering the instrument to Johnny Silver, who took it like a trophy. "Careful," Lugh cautioned, "that radiates—"

Johnny Silver nodded. "I can feel it shaking in my hand."

"What have you got?" Ocelot called to Jubal and Tamarind, who were standing a little beyond the door, almost ten feet into the room. Both of them were staring intently at the floor.

"There's a whole lot of energy concentrated right in this spot," Jubal said, gesturing to the area that extended from just inside the door to where he and Tamarind stood.

"And it's hot," Tamarind added. "The barrier that separates it from us is paper thin. The least little thing could tear it apart—"



"—and let that energy loose," Lugh said, finishing Tamarind's sentence.

"I know how to direct that energy," Johnny Silver said. As he spoke, his hands fingered the flute.

"The flute?" Ocelot guessed.

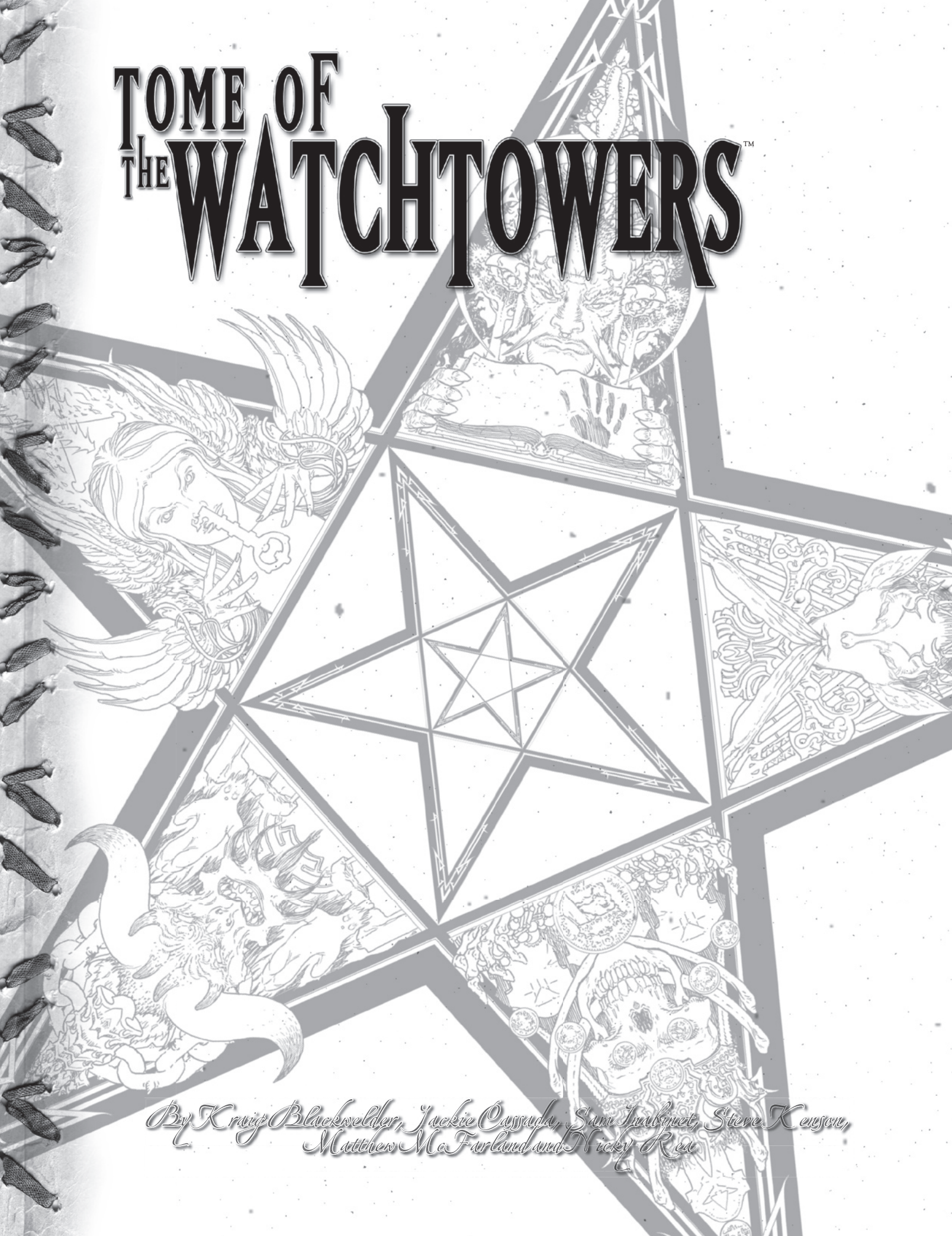
Johnny Silver nodded. "The odds of our survival have gotten astronomically better."

"We'd better put it together quickly, folks," Lugh said. "It's almost sunrise."

Not a sound escaped the five mages as they heard the invading Banishers make their way through each downstairs room and then storm up the stairs. They heard the sound of gunfire. A faint smell of burnt graphite wafted through the air.

Ocelot nodded once as she felt the presence of their quarry outside the door to the library. Johnny Silver returned her nod and lifted the flute to his lips. His timing was perfect.

TOME OF THE WATCHTOWERS™



By Kraig Blackwelder, Jackie Cassada, Sam Inabinet, Steve Kenson, Matthew McFarland and Nicky Rea

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This book uses the supernatural for settings, characters and themes. All mystical and supernatural elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only. This book contains mature content. Reader discretion is advised.

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TOME OF THE WATCHTOWERS™

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INTRODUCTION

Whoever desires to attain God avoids large numbers and movements as much as he can. Let us therefore, my Gregorio, retire into that one unmoving watchtower of the mind, where, as Plato says, the unseen light will shine unceasingly upon us.

— Marcilio Ficino

Symbology

All the world's wealth of occult and spiritual systems harkens to one or more Supernal Realms. Even Sleepers — especially those on the mystic fringes of society, who delve into otherworldly philosophies — are connected to the Supernal World through dreams and the urgings of their Sleeping souls. Metaphysically speaking, the reason certain symbols seem so potent and impossible to "pin down" with a simple explanation is that they point to something Supernal. It's like trying to understand three dimensions if you only know two-dimensional lines (read Edwin Abbot's *Flatland*). The truth of the Supernal World will always elude the two-dimensional thinking of Fallen World minds, but the Supernal can still be sensed intuitively by the soul.

So, real-world philosophies of occultism — voodoo, Hermetics, pagan witchcraft — are not exactly untrue. They are metaphors for the Supernal, not to be taken literally (though many Sleepers do). Mages use these systems and symbols to strengthen their sympathetic connection to their Path Realm. This isn't an issue of game mechanics, however. It's an issue of personal expression for the mage, a philosophical aid he uses to give his intuition an appearance and a name.

What This Book Is

Though this book is presented with the voice and appearance of a definitive manual, it's not. It's actually an inspirational catalog. No person — mortal or mage — adheres to all the summative statements made about his background, profession or family. No mage makes choices based on this book, because no mage has read this book.

The bias in **Tome of the Watchtowers** is shameless. Each chapter, devoted to one of the five Supernal Paths, relates lore on the history, but each chapter also shows generally how mages of that Path think and what they hear about the other Paths. Each chapter contains the same general breakdown of information on the Paths, divided into key sections: History, Thesis, Praxis, Rites, Society, Character Creation and a new Legacy. Each chapter also spins these ideas a bit, riffs on them, revealing what is often important to the mages of that Path.

Remember, though, that the best any survey of the Paths can do is report on just some of the mages out there. New historical accounts wait to be discovered and recorded. New artifacts are being unearthed every year. Every mage has the power and potential to make new legends.

It's not important that your character act and think the way this books commands. What's important is that your character — who probably has more experience with the fictional culture of the Awakened in the World of Darkness than you do — has heard a lot of the legends and suppositions in this book. What he thinks and chooses to do next is for you to decide.

Dedications

A dedication is a strict practice of living that rewards a mage with Mana, without a Hallow or a need for Prime magic. Such a practice takes the form of a vow (of celibacy, poverty, silence or charity, for example) to which the mage must always adhere. A mage who maintains his discipline gleans Mana from his refined habitation of the Fallen World and the insight he attains from structured thought.

Mages are often strange people, though, and the vows they undertake may be strange, too. Though this book offers numerous examples of dedications based on each Path, any vow that satisfies the player and the Storyteller may qualify as a dedication. This is a wonderful way for players to set their characters apart from the stereotypes of their Path or become more closely involved with their cabal. Consider a cabal of mages with vows of poverty or a subculture of mages throughout the city who go without speech for six months of the year — vows suitable for a dedication should personify a character while also leaving him somewhat vulnerable or restricted. A vow that costs a character nothing earns him nothing.

The breaking of a dedication vow should have consequences beyond just the loss of Mana, however. Nothing that's sworn lightly can fairly be called a vow. A player may choose a dedication to gain vital Mana, but no mage character has read the rules for dedications. Most mages with a dedication take their vows for personal, philosophical reasons first — the benefits of Mana are their reward.

A mage with a vow of poverty and the Virtue of Charity faces psychological troubles when he keeps money. A fasting fakir who indulges in Gluttony suffers the loss or pity of his peers. An alcoholic wizard with a vow of sobriety risks the destruction of his marriage and expulsion from his clean-liv-

	Acanthus	Mastigos	Moros	Obrimos	Thyrsus
Tarot card	The Fool	The Devil	Death	Strength	The Moon
Watchtower	Waterfall	Forge	Mausoleum	Spire	Cave
Element	Air	Void	Earth	Fire	Water
Weapon	Bow	Knife	Hammer	Spear	Staff
Color	Green/Blue	Black	Gray	White/Yellow	Red/Brown
Jewel	Emerald	Topaz	Diamond	Ruby	Sapphire
Plant	Bramble	Nightshade	Yew	Oak	Vine
Earthly animal	Bird	Snake	Moth	Dog	Cat
Mythic animal	Unicorn	Manticore	Basilisk	Hippogriff	Minotaur
Fragrance	Cedar	Sulfur	Cinnamon	Saffron	Musk
Fabric	Wool	Silk	Linen	Fleece	Fur
Vehicle	Ship	Palanquin	Wagon	Chariot	Mule
Planet	Venus	Mars	Jupiter	Saturn	Moon
Food	Fruit	Meat	Vegetable	Bread	Wine

ing cabal if he takes a drink. The loss of Mana is the least of their worries.

Game Mechanics

The rules for dedications are simple: When the mage upholds his vow for one week it is considered Dedicated and he gains one Mana. If he breaks his vow at any point while it is Dedicated, he loses one Mana and breaks the vow's dedication. Note that the mage not only fails to gain Mana from the broken vow, but actually loses one Mana from his current pool.

A vow is either Dedicated or not, it's not a matter of degrees. A vow cannot be abandoned — once it is Dedicated it is maintained (supplying one Mana per week) until broken (costing one Mana). A mage can't give up his vow without the accompanying loss of Mana.

Once a vow is broken, the mage does not lose more Mana for actions against his vow — he cannot violate a vow that is not being maintained. He does not lose Mana again until he has successfully maintained his vow for another week, after which a break from the vow costs him the Mana he just earned.

The seven-day period necessary to Dedicate and maintain a vow can begin at any time, though many vow-takers select a customary time such as 12:01 a.m. or the hour of their Awakening. The character gains one Mana at that moment each week as long as the dedication is maintained. Thus the mage who begins his one-week fast at one minute past midnight on Sunday gains one Mana at one minute past midnight on the following Sunday. The mage who's vow of sobriety began when he woke up in a hospital bed at three o'clock on a Saturday afternoon gains one Mana Saturday afternoons at three o'clock.

Example: *Joshua, a Thyrsus mage, Awakened following the sudden death of his fiancé, Rebekah. To honor (and symbolize) the marriage he lost, he undertakes a vow of celibacy – though Rebekah is dead, Joshua strives to remain devoted to her. This focus and discipline leads Joshua to mystical insight and a refinement of his power. Though he didn't take his vow for this purpose, it is his dedication. Only in time, however, does Joshua come to understand that his vow has been helping him gain Mana.*

For months, Joshua receives one Mana each week for upholding his vow. On the sixth day of a dedication week, more than a year after taking his vow, Joshua falters. He goes home, drunk, with a Sleeper woman who lives in his apartment building and wakes the next morning in her bed feeling diminished and weakened. That week's celibacy is undone. Instead of gaining one Mana on the seventh day, Joshua loses one Mana.

If Joshua upholds his vow for another full week, long enough to gain at least one Mana, he again becomes susceptible to the cost of breaking that vow. If he acts against his vow again without completing at least one dedication week, he suffers no Mana loss. And yet, he still slips into a shadowy depression as he betrays the memory of his symbolic wife and neglects his Virtue of Faith.



Acanthus
Path of Thistle

"I feel like we've been traveling in circles!" Merinoc cried, frustration adding a desperate sound to his voice. "You said your sanctum was just beyond this patch of overgrown weeds." The young man, just out of his teens, stopped for a moment and wiped the sweat from his forehead with his forearm. He looked at the machete he'd been using to slice away at the ever-thickening mass of brush and long grass and the ever-present thorny vines.

"Yes, I did say that," Merinoc's companion replied. A tall, slender man in his early 50s with long, white hair worn in a single braid down his back, Anoki had accepted Merinoc as his student though the old man rarely taught magic anymore. "And it's true. You're not beyond the patch yet."

"How much longer will it take?" Merinoc asked. He looked ahead and despaired. The bushes seemed to have grown even thicker than before, and he could no longer see past the next layer of growth.

"How much longer do you think it should take?" Anoki's voice was mild, unperturbed by his student's struggle.

"What kind of answer is that?" Merinoc said. In all his life, through prep school, his first year of college and the near-fatal prank that led to his Awakening, he had always found his questions answered to his satisfaction. His father told him about sex and drugs, his older brother schooled him on rock and roll (and drugs), his professors filled his head with knowledge and his girlfriend filled his heart with answers about marriage and family.

He looked around suddenly as his next step nearly took him to his knees when the brush suddenly fell back into an open clearing. He steadied himself and turned to look back at Anoki, who was regarding him from a nearby tree-stump, a look of satisfaction on his face.

"I thought this trek would never end," he said and then cut off his next words as he heard himself for the first time. "It was me, wasn't it?" he said. Anoki nodded, understanding without explanations. Merinoc had to hear himself clarify his epiphany. "The trip was as long as I thought it would be. I created my own destiny and my own timing, didn't I?"

Anoki smiled openly this time. "That's what being Acanthus is all about," he said. "Now let's go to the cabin. I'm starving!"

We surely know by some nameless instinct more about our futures than we think we know.
—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters*

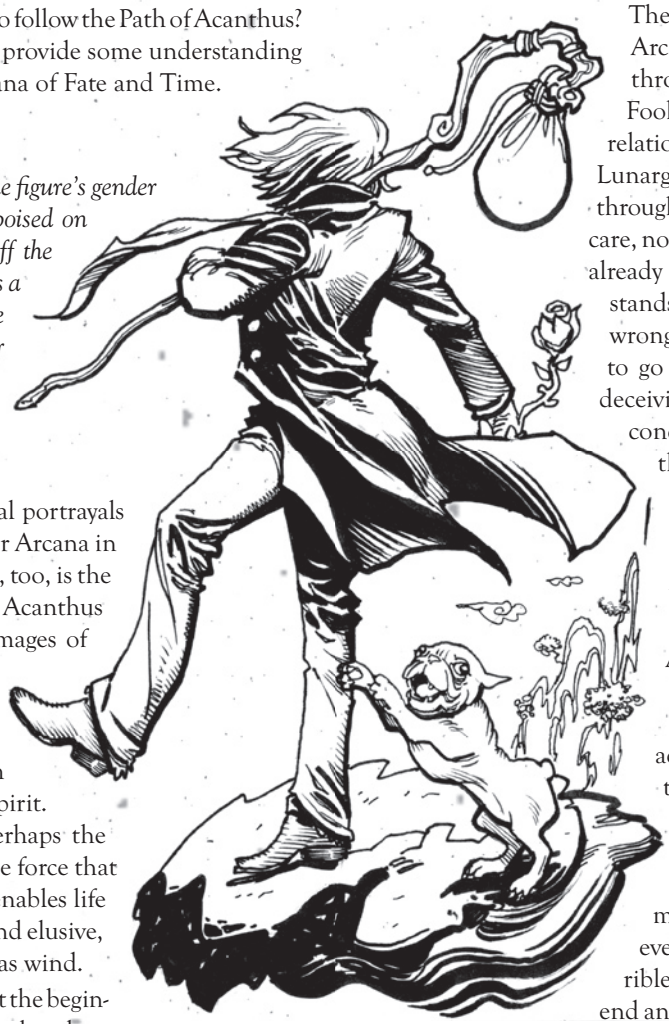
Introduction

The Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn stands like a luminescent beacon within the Realm of Arcadia. The influence of the Fae spreads its aura of constant change over the Realm and touches all those who walk the Path of Thistle to inscribe their names on the walls of the tower and embrace the Path of Acanthus.

What does it mean, however, to follow the Path of Acanthus? The following meditations may provide some understanding about the guardians of the Arcana of Fate and Time.

Theme: The Fool

A young man or woman (for the figure's gender is deliberately obscured) stands poised on the edge of a cliff, as if to step off the edge. In one hand, the figure holds a rose; the other hand steadies a pole on his shoulder. A pouch hangs over the end of the pole. At the figure's feet, a small dog, its face trained on its master, trots happily, ready to go wherever its master fancies.



This is one of the most typical portrayals of the Fool, the first of the Major Arcana in most standard Tarot decks. This, too, is the card associated with the Path of Acanthus and its correspondences with mages of that Path are many.

The Fool is linked to the Hebrew letter *aleph*, the beginning of the Hebrew alphabet, and with the concept of the breath of the spirit. *Aleph* is associated with air, perhaps the first of the four elements and the force that powers speech and sound. Air enables life and being, yet is itself invisible and elusive, untouchable except in its form as wind.

The Fool atop the cliff stands at the beginning of all things, ready to take the plunge. Does he fall from the world of ideas, untried and untested, into the "real" world of action and results? Or does the image of the Fool represent the fall of the Atlantean mages from the Supernal World into the Fallen World?

The Realm of the Fae is also associated with the Path of Acanthus, and the Fool of the Tarot is nothing if not Fae-like in both demeanor and dress. The central figure projects an air of carelessness and insouciance, standing above mortal concerns or emotions. A different set of ethics drives this being, whose form emanates a joyous sense of adventure as, staff in one hand, rose in the other, this creature of air and wonder gets ready to step off the edge into a world of action — or, perhaps, to take a leap of faith and land outside the "box" of common knowledge and belief.

The Path of Acanthus embraces the Arcana of Fate and Time. Looking through these twin filters at the Fool, other aspects of that card's relationship to the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn come to life. Seen through the eyes of Fate, the Fool has no care, no "worries," because the future is already in the hands of Fate. The Fool stands on Fate's side, so what can go wrong? And, if something does seem to go wrong, appearances are often deceiving, and a seeming tragedy can conceal a blessing. When viewed through the filter of Time, the Fool could be moving either forward or backward, or could be frozen in time, a symbol of the eternal beginning.

Just as the Fool, those whose Awakening takes them to the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn know without thinking, act without fearing and accept the consequences of their deeds, whether for good or ill, with a sense of wonder and acceptance. The Fool represents the moment of Awakening, when everything is new and strange, terrible and beautiful, and in which the end and the beginning are one perfect fated instant in time.

Mood: Mercurial Flux

A sense of ever-changing circumstances permeates anything associated with the Path of Acanthus. Acanthus mages are hard to pin down because their Path is hard to pin down. Time

seems to move differently in places where the Thistle Path's energies are strong, either slowing down so that a moment seems to last forever or else speeding up in such a way that a year seems little longer than a day. Fate or luck surrounds the actions of Acanthus mages, so that they appear to walk freely into danger only to emerge unscathed on the other side. Because many Acanthus mages place their faith in luck, they appear rash and thoughtless. This apparent lack of planning or caring lends a sense of fickleness to all things Acanthus, yet nothing could be further from the truth.

Both Time and Fate revolve around the concept of constant change and constant motion. Time is always ticking away. Fate changes as the probabilities and possibilities change. Sometimes these changes are sudden and drastic; at other times, they are both subtle and gradual. Acanthus mages learn literally to "go with the flow," since their magic binds them to the eternal fluctuations of the cosmic pulse (Time) and the vagaries of the cosmic Will (Fate).

This sense of fluidity is the primary mood for the Path of the Thistle. Nothing is permanent. Unlike the tenets of the Path of Thyrsus, nothing in the Path of the Thistle is written in stone. Not only does this make Acanthus the most flexible of Paths, but the fluidity also makes this Path one of the most difficult to pin down. As soon as something definite emerges about the Path or the mages who walk it, the edges of the definition begin to fray, the tapestry unravels and a new image forms from the tattered ends of the old one. But this new image does not maintain permanency, either.

Not only are rules and patterns and images pertaining to Acanthus in flux, time and movement are also subject to change without notice. An Acanthus mage may find her perceptions of time speeding up or slowing down for no apparent reason. She may learn to live between the minutes or to do nothing for hours without suffering from boredom. While Sleepers see time as an arrow, moving only in one direction, Acanthus mages see time as a boomerang, capable of reversing its trajectory and returning full circle to the place of its beginning.

Mythic History

The passing of time barely touches some lands, while other places in the world seem to dwell in many times simultaneously. In those places, those who are Awakened can discern the work of travelers on the Path of Acanthus. Many stories that those in the Sleeping world holds dear to their slumbering hearts borrow from the Realm of Enchantment and have origins in the shadow of the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn.

Merlin's Sleep: A Story About Time

Just as many theories exist about the origins of and the reality behind the legend of King Arthur or Arthur Pendragon or Artus Britannicus Rex as do stories about Merlin the Wizard or Emrys Merlinus or the High Druid Merlin. Perhaps the oldest and least known of those legends claims Merlin as one of the survivors of Atlantis, not the greatest of these, but certainly a powerful mage of both Time and Fate.

According to many versions of Merlin's story, the wizard lived "backwards," remembering the future of others as most people remember the past yet unable to predict his own future because it lay behind him. Though he helped make Arthur King of the Britons, according to the legends, Merlin could not prevent his own imprisonment or slumber (or death) at the hands of the sorceress Nimue, who some claimed to be one of the Fae.

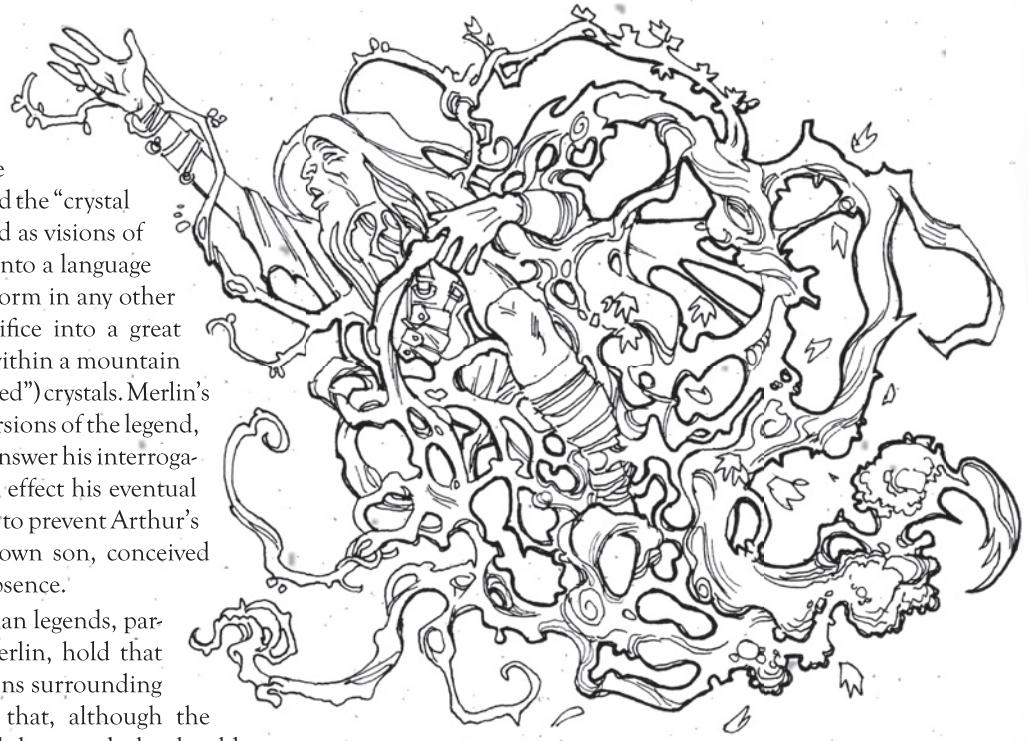
One treatise from the *Librum Temporis* (*Book of Time*), a manuscript containing early writings on the Arcanum of Time that dates from the early Middle Ages makes a curious reference to Merlin, Arthur and the story of the wresting of the sword from the stone. The author, an Acanthus mage of the Mysterium who masqueraded for most of his life as a friar of the order of St. Columba, writes as follows:

And the lad stepped forward and drew forth the sword, holding it high above his head, and those who saw it remarked that it appeared as if for a moment time moved backward and the boy seemed to undo the action of plunging the sword into the stone rather than take the sword from the great rock, which today is an holy stone. A shadowy figure, somewhat like unto a spirit, hovered over the boy, his actions reflecting the motion of thrusting the sword into the stone. And the thought occurred to me, these many years later, that perhaps those good witnesses saw, but, for a moment, the doubling of time upon itself. Who, therefore is to say that the boy who would be king of Britain had not actually placed the sword himself in the stone and that in a moment in which time stood upon its head he undid his own action? If this is so, then there was one who was responsible for this strange moment of time bending in upon itself and flowing backward. In it I see a secret hand at work that is both comforting and familiar, for it tells me that I am not alone in this Fallen World.

— translated from the Latin *Meditations* of Fra. Amberino Umberticus by an anonymous source

Merlin vanishes from the Arthurian tales at a crucial juncture in Arthur's history, thus preventing Arthur from avoiding certain misjudgments that were to prove disastrous for the king but necessary for the legend. In several versions, Merlin's disappearance is attributed to the wiles of Nimue, who, in some tales, is referred to as a sorceress and in others as a "nymph," thus implying a link with the world of the Fae. Merlin is said to have fallen in love with her or else succumbed to her enchantments. In either case, he is spirited away and imprisoned either in a tree or in a crystal cave.

One version of this tale, again told only in circles of Acanthus mages as a warning against too much meddling in the affairs of mortals, claims that Merlin was brought by Nimue to the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn to answer for his workings



among the warring tribes of Britain. Both the images of the "tree" and the "crystal cave" may be construed as visions of the Watchtower translated into a language unable to embrace its true form in any other words, transmuting the edifice into a great thorned tree or else a cave within a mountain of luminescent ("moon-silvered") crystals. Merlin's appearance later, in some versions of the legend, indicate that he was able to answer his interrogators satisfactorily enough to effect his eventual release—though not in time to prevent Arthur's death at the hands of his own son, conceived during Merlin's untimely absence.

Some students of Arthurian legends, particularly those involving Merlin, hold that Merlin foresaw the conditions surrounding Arthur's death and knew that, although the wizard could have prevented the tragedy, he should not. There are stories of how Merlin went willingly, though mournfully, with Nimue to his place of captivity, knowing that in order for Arthur to meet his predestined fate, Arthur's mentor would have to be removed. Likewise, some tales credit Mordred with foreknowledge of his own dark destiny, seeing himself as the instrument of Arthur's necessary fall to maintain the balance between light and dark that underpins the dynamic interplay of good and evil in the world. Fate must be served in all things, and, for every hero, there is a heroic death.

Sleeping Beauty: A Tale of Fate and Awakening

Another ancient tale that holds clues to the presence of the Path of Acanthus has come down to modern times as the legend of the Sleeping Beauty, preserved by the French fabulist Charles Perrault and retold by many authors until finally transmogrified and sanitized for childhood by the "magic" of the animated movie. Those who walk the Path of Acanthus know a slightly different version of the story.

In essence, the tale is an allegory about the arrivals of the first mages to visit the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn. The tale begins innocently enough, with a newborn princess in a palace, much loved and many times blessed. One of the many Fae in the world does not receive an invitation, for the child's royal parents fear that this particular Fae creature is malicious in her intent and that she can only hurt their child. The snubbed faerie appears and curses the child, prophesying that when she reaches 16 years of age, she will prick her finger on a spindle and die. Her "gift" given, the evil faerie departs, satisfied that she has gotten vengeance on those who ignored her.

One of the invited Fae, however, had not yet given the child, whose name is Aurora, or "Dawn," her gift. The faerie cannot totally undo the curse, but she can use her power to mitigate it so that the princess does not die. All will transpire as her malefactor decreed except that instead of dying, the princess—and all those within the castle—will fall into a deep slumber lasting 100 years. This slumber can only be broken when a prince proves himself brave enough to penetrate the protective wall of thorns around the palace, find the princess and bestow upon her the kiss of true love.

So far, the tale differs little from the tale most people know. But this is an allegory, so the primary elements all symbolize something else—in this case, the story of the fall of Atlantis and the building of the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn.

The evil faerie represents the Exarchs, who wish to kill magic after the fall of Atlantis. The Princess Aurora is the essence of the Awakened spirit, for "dawn" is the time of awakening. Her catastrophic sleep, and the sleep of all those within the castle, stands for the waning of magic as the survivors of Atlantis' destruction fail to reconnect with the Supernal World across the gulf of the Abyss. The last faerie, who finds a way to save Aurora from her Fate, might be the great king who erected the Watchtower, though that is not certain. What is sure is that the wall of thorns surrounding the castle after Aurora fell asleep symbolizes nothing less than the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn, as the thick brambles and briers that grew like walls around the palace must have glowed luminescent in the moonlights of a 100 years.

The prince who made his way through the thorns and penetrated the castle to find the princess is the mage who Awakens and finds his way to the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn. The kiss of true love that awakens the princess is the mage's own Awakening and the stirring of his one true pas-

sion, his magic. It is this kiss and the blood he sheds on his way through the thorns that inscribe his name on the walls of the Watchtower. This is also, however, the loss of innocence for both the prince and the princess, for having Awakened, a mage can never return to the blissful ignorance of his life as a Sleeper.

This is the tale that is re-enacted time and time again by every mage who finds herself blessed with the touch of the Path of the Thistle. Through this story, Fate plays a part. Prophecies are made and unmade, and only one person is "fated" to be the first to discover and enter the Watchtower. The Princess' life is governed by her fate just as the coming of her prince is foretold and made part of the tale. Though in the more dilute versions of this tale, the prince and princess live happily ever after, in other, purer versions, this is not always the case. But they do live, just as magic lives on even in a world filled with Sleepers.

Faerie Mounds: Crossroads of Time and Fate

Once upon a time, a young bard named Oisin traveled to the world of the Fae. Inside a great, hilly mound, he found a world beyond his mortal dreams. He was loved by the Queen of the Fae, honored by their courtiers for his beautiful voice and his elegant songs. All day long, he feasted on fine foods and finer wines. All night long, he sang for the Fae courts, danced with the Queen and enjoyed other pleasures best left to the imagination, for one thing the Fae do not lack is the gift of inventing new things to do.

Oisin, nevertheless, longed to see the world he had left behind, to smell the scent of freshly-turned earth and to see what had happened to the friends he once knew. After many attempts at cajoling the Queen, he finally got his wish. The Queen brought to him a milk-white steed with a fiery step and a steady heart. This horse, she told him, would carry him beyond the mound and into the world of mortals without harm. She cautioned him to remain mounted during his visit, for, as she said, time ran differently within the mound and should his feet touch the ground of the world outside, all his years would come crashing round him and he would surely die.

Oisin promised the Queen he would do as he was told. He kissed her farewell and clucked to his steed, who dashed away at the speed of thought and traveled through the lands of the Fae and out through the hidden door in the faerie mound. Ah, but when he rides across the once familiar land of his childhood, nothing looks the same. He finds his village in ruins, his family and friends all long dead.

He remembers what his Fae lover told him — that time passes differently — and realizes that many many years have gone by since he last saw his home. Hundreds, perhaps even 1,000 years separate him from the world he once knew. Sadly, he turns his horse around to return to the world of the Fae, the only world now that means anything to him.

As he rides back, he sees an old couple struggling to lift a heavy rock from the middle of the road so that they can get their cart past it. Oisin, being kind-hearted and realizing that this old couple might even be his brother's children's children, stops to help them, but as he tries to put a rope around the rock to pull it to the roadside, he slips off his horse.

His foot touches the earth for only a second before he springs back into the saddle, but the deed is done. His body remembers that it is mortal and that it must age, and before the eyes of the old man and woman, Oisin's face grows lined and cracked with age, his eyes fill with milky webs and his hair thins and falls limp around his head. His bones shrivel up with the aches and pains of old age, and his feet grow cold. All the years rush in on him, and he ages beyond the term of most mortals until his body turns to dust and falls to the ground, where it becomes lost in the soil of the ages.

The horse snorts and tosses its head, then bolts homeward faster than the speed of sorrow. When the Queen sees the horse return, its saddle empty, she gives a great cry of sadness, for she knows that her mortal lover is dead.

This sad tale exists in many forms, but in its purest version, the story is a warning tale of the dangers of the misuse of the Time and Fate Arcana. Regardless of his power to live beyond his "time" within the faerie mound, Oisin cannot cheat Time. All Acanthus mages must pay Time its due. Though they may prolong it, distort it or use it to their advantage, eventually, Time will take what is due it. Fate, as well, has a way of turning back on itself and undoing what has been done in its name.

There are some historians among the Acanthus who point to the story of Oisin and his faerie lover Niamh as two of the earliest Acanthus mages. Niamh could only exist in the world of the Watchtower, spanning the Abyss in a place where Time and Fate were still at her command. Oisin risked everything to learn how to live in the Fallen World and paid for his desire with his life, yet his fatal mistake stands as a warning to all who come after him not to test too far the limits of either Time or Fate.

Recorded History

Legends preserve eternal truths and keep alive stories that teach humanity how to aspire to greatness or warn them of the perils of straying from the path of honor. Such legends are hard to pin down in terms of time and place. Indeed, many of them pertain to several different times and places.

Not so with history. The actions of humanity in the Fallen World, caught on time's arrow and hurtling forward into the future form a pattern of events that have been likened to a tapestry — a tapestry in motion. By examining the threads at the back of the tapestry, the workings of Acanthus mages can be seen and the story of their Path's survival to the present day can be read by tracing the weave of colored threads on the backcloth. Indeed, all the Paths were influential in helping form the direction of

human history, though most of them worked in the backgrounds to teach and assist the true movers-and-shakers through the centuries. But in a few places, the mages of the Path of Thistle stood out.

Druids and Standing Stones

Some of the earliest Acanthus mages mingled with the tribes who erected the great monoliths in the British Isles. Of all these stone formations, the circles that make up Stonehenge are by far the most famous— and the ones most in tune with the Path of Acanthus.

Erected before recorded history, these stones serve a special purpose during the solstice celebrations. The light of the summer solstice sun shines over the unique stone known as the Heel Stone and radiates between the pillars of a capped pair of stones that frame the Heel Stone. The implications of this arrangement in terms of creating a touchstone for the calendar year and linking the physical world with the elusive nature of time bear the stamp of Acanthus mages.

Though we do not have specific names of these early mages who assimilated themselves into the three societies that built Stonehenge — the people of the Windmill, First Wessex culture and the Beaker people — we see their workings in the stone circle. Its association with time and prophesy, or fate, leave little room for doubt that Acanthus mages were among the shamans and tribal wise men and women who oversaw the placement of the stones at Stonehenge and in other places in the British Isles.

In other parts of the world, Acanthus mages helped other early tribes codify their belief in fate or luck or prophecy and, in a few, assisted in the creation of elaborate schemes — such as the Mayan calendar stone — for telling time and predicting the movement of the stars and the patterns of the weather.

Feudalism and the Bond of Words

Acanthus mages were undoubtedly among those who taught mortals the art of binding Fate to the spoken or sworn word. In the years after the fall of Rome, when literacy in Europe was confined to a few places, most of them monasteries, spoken oaths became the primary means of forging agreements and contracts between people or countries. In Celtic lands, bards and druids held the ability to administer oaths. Bards and other lorekeepers, by preserving the knowledge of personal and tribal histories by means of their prodigious memories, created reality — for lacking contradictory sources, what the bards remembered and recited became fact.

When merchants needed binding contracts to secure their trade, when soldiers needed to swear loyalty to their captain or lord, when subjects promised to serve a ruler, they all needed some way to assure that their promises were binding. From this need, oaths arose — and Acanthus mages, familiar as they were with the binding powers of oaths, helped mortals codify the process of swearing oaths.

The feudal period in history was based on the giving of oaths. At each level of society, oaths of fealty were sworn and witnessed. These verbal bonds gave structure to society and enabled the peoples of Europe to pull themselves out of the darkness of the preceding centuries.

With the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215, the spoken bond became the written bond and modern society began.

Renaissance and Illusions

Feudalism gradually gave way to the emergence of a middle class of merchants and craftsmen, and power grew to reside in the guild halls as much as in the castles and monasteries. Acanthus mages, whose expertise lay in the recognition of the workings of fate in the patterns of life, saw the future and hedged their bets by linking themselves with those they had marked for success. Thus, Acanthus mages found ways to insinuate themselves into the courts of princes and abbots, of guildmasters and burgomasters, ever in the background shifting the tides of fortune in concurrence with their visions.

The rise of secular power also encouraged the growth of the power of the Seers of the Throne, who sought to obscure the influence of magic by placing more and more responsibility in the hands of mortals and by hunting down mages wherever the Seers could find them. Many of the witch hunts of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were fueled by information fed to the Inquisition and the Church by influential members of the Seers of the Throne.

During the Renaissance, Acanthus mages took advantage of the general interest in the occult, as the fascination with fortune-telling, particularly through the use of Tarot decks, struck even the highest-born nobles. So many breakthroughs in the fine arts took place at this time that the influence of the "Fool" of the Tarot cannot be overlooked. Acanthus mages, with their attitude of risk-taking, encouraged painters and sculptors to do the same, provoking them to new heights of artistic excellence.

Just ahead, however, was the two-edged sword of the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment and the Rise of Liberty

The rise of logic and science in the 17th and 18th centuries held both advantage and hardship for Acanthus mages, who had now made their home in the Fallen World and were many generations removed from the Atlantean catastrophe. To these mages' detriment, the scientists and philosophers of the Enlightenment — Descartes, Locke, Rousseau and their contemporaries — attempted (and largely succeeded) in proving the ascendancy of reason over faith, of the scientific method over magical processes and of logical thinking over emotional guesswork. At the same time, however, literary philosophers such as Voltaire were encouraging a return to the "natural" man, the individual as an innocent, devoid of preconceptions such as religion and superstition. In other words, the "Fool."

It was this spirit of discovery and exploration that allowed Acanthus mages to preserve themselves. Furthermore, as humanist philosophy reached political maturity, the concepts of national sovereignty and personal liberty grew, giving rise to the American and French Revolutions and to upheavals throughout Europe. Acanthus mages found ways to insert themselves into all the Atlantean orders in both the Old and New Worlds and to encourage the makers of history to take the risks that shaped the modern world.

Not surprisingly, many modern governments are based on the swearing of oaths and on written compacts between the governed and the governors.

Finding Faerie-land

With the growth of science and natural philosophy, belief and interest in mythical creatures — such as the Fae — waned. Though a few places, such as Ireland, parts of Scandinavia and much of Asia maintained a tradition of belief in supernatural, guardian or trickster creatures, most of the "civilized," industrial world belittled what they could not see or experience through their other senses.

Because of the Acanthus mages' association with the Realm of Arcadia and of the Fae, Acanthus mages did what they could to counter this strict rationality. Suddenly, Victorians developed a craze for faeries. The development of photography had already made possible the act of capturing moments in time. Now many Victorian amateur photographers, among them Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, set out to photograph faeries. As the growth in spiritualism flooded the Victorian Era, more and more sightings of faeries were reported. Traces of influence by Acanthus mages are visible throughout the 19th century, as interest in the occult grew into a major movement. Many occultists sought to merge spiritualism with science, and certainly these individuals had the assistance or tacit support of mages of the Path of Acanthus.

A reawakened interest in fairy tales as more than moral homilies also blossomed in the 19th century. Many of the standard books and illustrations of fairy tales, such as the works of Andrew Lang and the drawings of Arthur Rackham, epitomized this widespread trend. Only the realities of war and economic depression in the following century could dampen the ardor for touching the world of the Fae.

Summer of Love

During much of the 20th century, the influence of Acanthus mages was minimal. Two world wars, a cold war and several localized conflicts in Korea and Southeast Asia created an atmosphere more conducive in aura to the workings of Obrimos, Moros and Mastigos mages, and, indeed, this was a time when followers of those Paths had, perhaps, more influence than ever. Those who followed the Path of the Thistle waited for the pendulum to swing.

In the 1960s, a new wind blew across the world, beginning in Eastern Asia and India, where strange philosophies of non-violence and universal tolerance mediated the warlike atmosphere that carried over from the 1940s. Acanthus mages realized their time had come again and moved quickly to add their influence into the cosmic "mix."

Perhaps the events surrounding the "Summer of Love" in 1967 epitomized the influence of Acanthus. It was as if the world spontaneously Awoke for one brief moment and embraced the principles of the Path of Acanthus for a glorious summer of timelessness and good fortune. The twin discoveries of Eastern philosophies and psychotropic drugs caused an explosion in consciousness in strata of society never before touched by the cosmic hand. This was also a time for the mages of the Path of Thyrsus to revel in their primal being.

The sudden popularity of Zen Buddhism and Eastern mysticism combined with the "discovery" of Native American wisdom and a reawakening of "magic" in the form of new interests in Wicca, the "old religion" and other pagan practices — and a new belief in the existence of the Fae. Psychotropic drugs and various kinds of meditation gave many Sleepers a taste of the arbitrariness of "time" and its illusionary nature.

Insights into the true nature of the world grew more widespread, and not just in the magical community. A revolution in science began as scientists, influenced perhaps by the surrounding "vibes," discovered new ways of looking at the world; their inroads into quantum physics made science seem akin to magic in the eyes of many. Acanthus mages felt their influence in the world had finally taken permanent root.

Not all of Acanthus' influence was positive or beneficial. The Summer of Love quickly passed into the Years of Violence. Woodstock's counterpart, Altamont, featured unprecedented acts of violence in the midst of a "peaceful" rock concert. The Zodiac killer terrorized California in 1971, his victims picked through some twisted logic that seemed either random or fated. In 1969, the Sharon Tate murders rocked the country. Charles Manson and his cult followers loomed as the antithesis of everything the Summer of Love was meant to be. Manson's reasons for the murders, his apocalyptic and prophetic visions of race wars bringing about civilization's end, were seen by most Sleepers as the sick workings of a warped mind. But these prophecies also point up the dark side of Acanthus, whose Path involves prophesy and fortune-telling. The Path to Utopia or Arcadia can also lead to the Apocalypse.

The Twenty-First Century and Beyond

Now, Acanthus mages feel for the first time that the possibility of achieving their goals is almost within reach. Having persisted through centuries of darkness and time-driven historical movements, these mages view the 21st century as an age of malleability, where time is flexible and mutable and where

they, as masters of Time, can shape the world in their image. And with their mastery of Fate, they feel they just might succeed.

Fortune's Fools

A path, by definition, leads from one place to another. Whether the pathway is easy to follow or filled with pitfalls and obstacles, whether broad or narrow, smooth or rocky, straight or winding, it still connects its beginning to its end — and it can be traveled in either direction. The Path of the Thistle, or the Path of Acanthus, connects the Fallen World to the Supernal Realm of Arcadia, the true home of Acanthus mages and the seat of the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn.

The Realm

The name "Arcadia" comes from the Greek *Arkas*, the legendary founder of the Peloponnesian region so named. Associated with a rural, idyllic paradise, Arcadia has also come to be synonymous with "fairyland" or the Realm of faerie. Arkas' mother was Kallisto (or Callisto), the sister and most devoted follower of Artemis, the celestial huntress. Lusted after by Zeus, Callisto bore his child. Hera, taking her revenge on the objects of Zeus' affections rather than on the god himself, changed Callisto into a bear. The child, named Arkas, grew up to found Arcadia. Later, according to other legends, he encountered his mother in the forest and, when she attempted to reunite with her son in spite of her bear form, attempted to slay her. Zeus, in an act of Olympian magnanimity, intervened and transformed both mother and son into Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, placing them in the sky as constellations.

Later on, a colony of Arcadians allegedly founded the city of Troy. The descendants of these Arcadians, survivors of the disastrous Trojan War, went on to found the city of Rome. Arcadia, as well, is the source of the River Alphaeus, which rose in the mountains but soon turned into an underground stream and became the source of many mysteries celebrated by esoteric poets through the ages.

Alternately, Biblical exegesis asserts the use of the word *arkas* as "beginning(s)," as in the first words of the Old Testament, "In the beginning(s) [*arkas*], God created the Heavens and the Earth." In this sense, the word *arkas* also refers to the beginning of the phenomenon of time, something that did not exist before the creation of the world. The mystical connection between Arcadia and the River Alphaeus (which contains the word *alpha*, the first letter of the Greek alphabet and the symbol for a beginning) thus becomes clear.

Other traditions link *arkas* with King Arthur, or "little bear," from the Roman word for "bear." Among tribal people from the North American continent to the steppes of Russia, bears have held a special place as totem animals or spirit guides. Nearly human in their tendency to walk erect and in their ferocious devotion to their cubs, bears figure in stories about self-sacrifice and assistance to tribes in need. Another side of the bear appears in the existence of "bear-cults" in Europe and in the rituals of the "berserker" warriors of Scandinavia and the Baltic regions.

The Realm of Arcadia evokes associations with many qualities, each of which has a manifestation in that part of the Supernal World. Rather than provide a finite geography of the Realm, for doing so in a place as mutable as Arcadia proves impossible, the following topics serve as milestones and building blocks from which the Realm arises in infinite combinations, depending on the perceptions of the observers.

While Acanthus mages only visit Arcadia during their Awakening, the following themes can be useful in spicing up Paradox anomalies and Arcadian Demesnes. For Acanthus mages, their remembrance of the geography of Arcadia becomes distilled into a few concepts, like landscapes that exist only in dreams.

Time and Timelessness

A sense of timelessness permeates Arcadia, yet this is not the timelessness of the stagnant or the unmoving. Rather, time has many meanings in this Realm of Time and Fate. Rivers rush forward from their origins to the great timeless sea, yet they never seem to move at all. Seasons proceed through their changes, but in a cyclical, rather than a serial progression. Many times seem to exist at one and the same time, giving rise to a timelessness that consists of many different times rather than of no time at all. The passage of time in Arcadia does not coincide with the passage of time anywhere else. Many of the stories in which mortals spend time in a land "under a hill" or asleep in a cave, emerging after a brief time in that other place to find that centuries have passed in their world originate in experiences of Arcadia's peculiar sense of time.

Fortune and Luck

Just as time and timelessness form the background motion for the Realm of Arcadia, fortune and luck constitute the materials that build the spiritual landscape of the region. The features of the Realm, from its towering mountains and clear lakes to its mysterious caves and gloomy swamps, seem to appear to the traveler through the Realm as if by chance, bearing some internal and unfathomable logic that owes nothing to the standard precepts of cause and effect. Places appear when and where needed, if luck is with the traveler, while those under a run of bad luck or ill fate find themselves constantly in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Mutability

Time and fortune combine to create a state of ever-mutating possibilities. Some say that no two people ever visit the same Arcadia twice, for each time it appears, even in the briefest dream, it is wholly other than what it had last been. A grassy

plain transforms overnight into a windswept desert, while a river that emptied into a vast sea one day runs deep into a mountain cavern the next. While most legends of Arcadia place the Alphaeus River in that Realm, the location of that river of beginnings changes continually.

Not just the physical features of Arcadia are subject to mutability. The weather in Arcadia puts to shame the changeability of weather in various places in the Fallen World notable for their fickle interplay of rain and shine, snow and drought. Great storms exist in Arcadia, where tornados stir up the air and earthquakes initiate further changes in the earth. These phenomena pass, yielding place and time to halcyon breezes and skies of seemingly endless blue.

The Fae

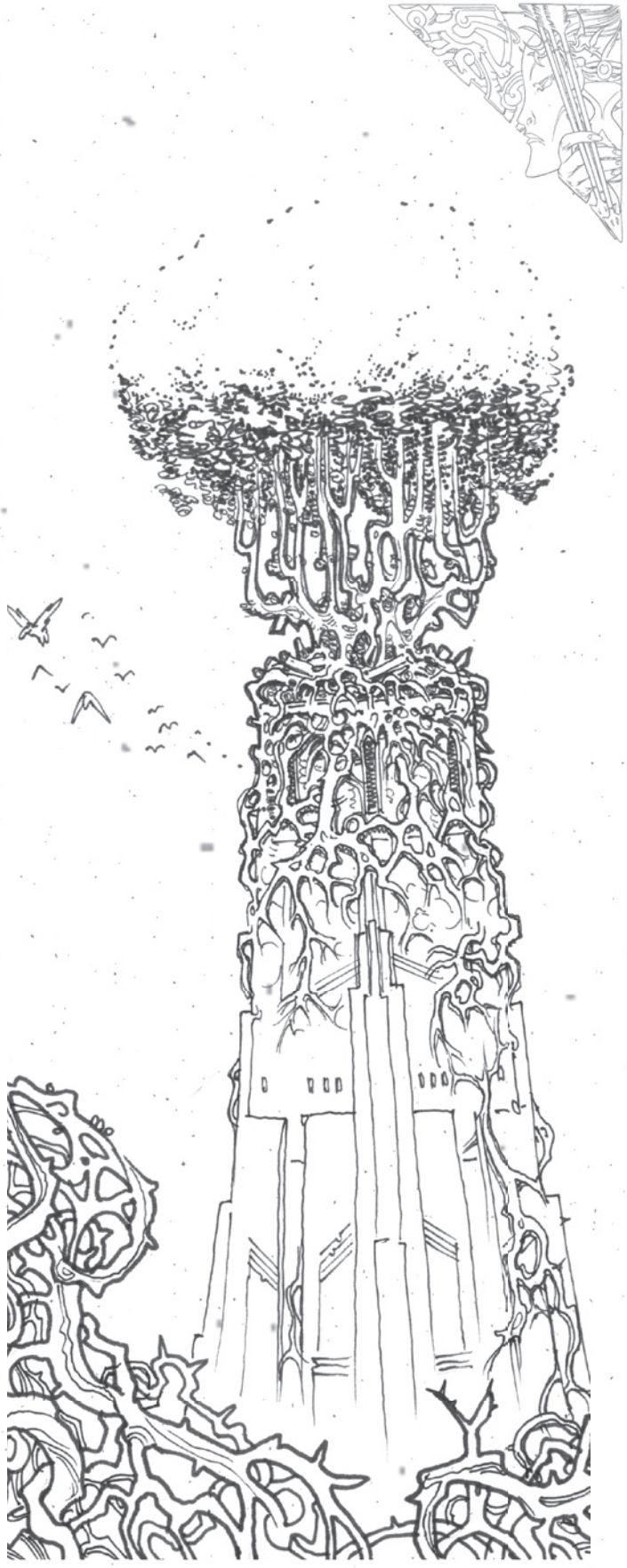
The Supernal Realm of Arcadia is not without its inhabitants. Here is the true dwelling place of the many creatures collectively known as "the Fae." Whether the awe-inspiring sidhe of Celtic lore, the Vanir of Norse mythology, the "invisible people" of Native American tales or the mysterious *jinn* of the Middle East, all these manifestations exist in their primal form in Arcadia. Beings of light and air, of moonglow and twilight, of passion and mutability, the Arcadian Fae do not so much dwell in the Realm as emerge from its changeable lands in all their elemental glory. The land and the Fae are not only connected in Arcadia, they seem to alternate forms of one another.

The Watchtower

The Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn occupies the centermost point of Arcadia and is, in fact, perhaps the only place in that Realm that rarely changes its location or essence. Though many subtle changes infiltrate the Watchtower's façade, it remains a fixed point in a maelstrom of ever-changing features. Seemingly made of brambles and lit by an eternally crescent moon, the tower occupies a place of permanent nighttime, yet the luminescent moonlight and the silvery thorns and roses that surround the tower prevent darkness from overwhelming it. Within the Watchtower are a series of circular chambers spiraling above one another from the largest room on the ground floor to the uppermost tower room with its single eastward-facing window. Each room's features change according to its occupant, and those who enter the Watchtower find themselves surrounded by a montage of elements from their past, present and future in every room they explore. There are those who say that other edifices exist in Arcadia, but, for now, only the Watchtower serves as the focus for those who travel there in their journey of Awakening.

The Laws of Arcadia

Arcadia is a Realm of magic, one of five in the Supernal World. In Arcadia, certain Arcana hold precedence over the others. Time and Fate are the ruling Arcana of Arcadia, while



Forces occupies the position of the inferior Arcana. All the other Arcanum types are common and hold neither precedence nor subordination within the Realm.

Because Time and Fate manifest so boldly in Arcadia, the Realm possesses the mutable traits discussed earlier. Time is both everywhere and nowhere in this Realm, while Fate decrees that certain geographical elements appear or disappear when and where they are needed or "fated" to be.

Another aspect of Fate that applies to all who enter Arcadia or any of its manifestations is the power of oaths and the given word. In Arcadia, more so than most other Realms, words have power; the spoken word has both its own innate power and the force given to it by the breath of utterance. What is said in Arcadia, appears. The essence of this power is epitomized in the words of Genesis: "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." The power of names, too, exists in Arcadia.

Some say that this is the Realm where all the shadow names have their origin. In the Bible, Adam named all the animals. Other legends from other cultures have similar tales of the origins of names. Even the fairy tale *Rumplestiltskin* illustrates the power of names and naming.

Those who travel in Arcadia or who are touched by its lunargent shadow need to take care with their speech, lest they inadvertently create something with their words that they do not wish to have manifest.

While a Realm as elusive and fluid as Arcadia should, by rights, have no "laws," as such, certain governing principles manifest as pillars of structure within the Realm, defining it and exercising pre-eminence over everything and everyone within the Realm. By extension, mages who follow the Path of the Thistle also find themselves subject to these ruling principles in their lives, particularly when touching the Supernal World through the use of their magic.

Time Is of the Essence — Arcadia is both with and without time. The movement of objects within space is a function of time, yet in Arcadia time moves as fast or as slowly as necessity dictates. A walk of a few miles can seem to take days, yet the walker may experience the time as minutes. A traveler or visitor to Arcadia needs to be mindful of the passage of time and respect its dominion over trivialities such as space and distance. Those who leave Arcadia find that they experience temporality differently forever after.

Fortune Favors the Bold — The Arcanum of Fate also releases its driving energy throughout the Realm of Arcadia. In the Realm of faerie and of beginnings, to do nothing is to languish, forever out of time's influence. Every action implies a risk, and the greater the risk, the more Fate smiles on the risk-taker. Yet those who are bold also try to keep the odds of success on their side. Knowledge that probability (or luck) is with them builds the bold state of mind that encourages the taking of risks. Those whose spirits are touched by Arcadia and who have inscribed their names within the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn learn to trust to Fate to bolster their actions — and more often than not, find their trust well placed.

Respect the Power of the Elements — Though Forces represent mighty energies in and of themselves, their presence in Arcadia is problematic. Arcadia has little power over Forces; mages who follow the Path of Acanthus find that the total mastery of Forces eludes them without extraordinary efforts. Weather in Arcadia is unpredictable; even Masters of Fate have a difficult time predicting weather patterns or movements. Lightning strikes when and where it wills; drought and flood, earthquakes and volcanoes all have the potential of disrupting the Arcadian pattern. Although Arcadia is not quite at the mercy of Forces, Arcadia's ruling Arcana cannot exercise sufficient control over the elements to render them capable of being ignored.

Correspondences

The Realm of Arcadia resonates through certain symbols and concepts. In the Fallen World, these symbols recall to mind hints of something greater. In Arcadia, however, many of these symbols have actual form and presence in addition to retaining their symbolic value. Though some of the symbols share certain qualities in common with others, for example, the perpetual motion of waterfalls and the almost constant motion of birds, each symbol also stands alone as representing some aspect of Arcadia or its Arcana.

The Tarot card known as "the Fool" has already been discussed in detail above. Here, however, its symbolism of innocence, naiveté, risk-taking, youth and androgyny all reach a confluence in Arcadia. Anyone who comes here feels at once more daring and more vulnerable, more willing to question assumptions and more unsure of what those assumptions are. Men who spend time in Arcadia (either physically or through meditation and study) take on more female sensitivities and characteristics, preferring passion over logic or acquiring a gentler demeanor. Women who experience Arcadia find their masculine tendencies becoming more prone to abstractions, more solution oriented and discover a new and brash energy within them that is usually characterized as male.

The card of the Fool is also a study in captured motion. That the Fool will do one of two things — step forward off the cliff to confront his (or her?) fate or step backward into his former existence (somewhat changed by the experience of nearly going off the edge) — seems a foregone conclusion. What the Fool will not do is stand still. Likewise, the Fool's companion animal is portrayed in dynamic motion, as if to emphasize the fact that the animal or instinctual nature impels the Fool onward to whatever fate holds.

Like the Fool, waterfalls are also symbols of dynamic and perpetual motion, their churning waters carrying energy to pools and lakes and rivers that otherwise might be still

and placid. The Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn, like a waterfall, is a dynamo of latent energy — the stuff of magic. Those who see the Watchtower under certain lights, such as moonlight, see the interplay of light and dark on its brambled surface, the ever-changing "ripples" formed by the shifting of light not unlike the splash and play of a mighty waterfall. Water is a purifying agent, and, to follow the Path of Acanthus, the mage must rediscover her innocence. Religions have long recognized the significance of purification by water as a path to a new beginning and as a symbol of rebirth.

Of the four or five elements, air is the one most closely related to the Path of Acanthus. Like the Fool, who symbolizes the breath of life, air is the breath of the universe. Astrologically, the three air signs — Gemini, Libra and Aquarius — all have some relation to the Path of Acanthus. Gemini, the sign of the Twins and the representative of mutable Air, lends its fickleness and instability as well as its incandescent and ever-changing creative spirit to its association with Acanthus. Libra, the Scales, represents cardinal Air and gives its qualities of balance and direction to Acanthus; just as wind has direction and motionless air exists in perfect balance, so does Acanthus demonstrate both strength and purpose despite its ethereal nature. The fixed sign Aquarius, the Waterbearer, provides perhaps the closest association with Acanthus of all the air signs. Where Gemini is air in constant motion, and Libra is directed and purposeful air flows, Aquarius symbolizes the cosmic "ether," the substance with which the universe breathes. The Waterbearer carries life-giving water from place to place, just as air carries life-giving rain on its meteorological journey around the world. The planet Venus is also related to the Path of Acanthus. Venus is the green planet, the symbol of love and passion and the only planet besides Earth in the solar system to have an atmosphere. Much of the Venus' details are hidden by the heavy mist that surrounds it, just as much of Arcadia's true nature is hidden by the vagaries of fate and time.

The element of air itself mirrors the ever-changing nature of Acanthus. From the gentle breezes of spring to the powerful gusts of the hurricane winds to the whirlwind of destruction that is the mighty tornado, air has many faces — and all of them are the faces of Acanthus.

The weapon most representative of the Path of the Thistle is the bow and arrow. An arrow in flight is, perhaps, the most aerodynamic weapon, its arc and direction guided by its feathered fletching which, like the wings of a bird, relies on the air to carry it to its target. Not surprisingly, the earthly animal associated with Acanthus is the bird. Birds depend on the air for flight, and the sight of an eagle soaring overhead or a tiny wren making short hops from bush to bush evoke a hint of the variety found in those who follow the Path of Acanthus. In fact, many Acanthus mages choose a type of bird as their unofficial "totem" or spirit animal. Sometimes, their familiars take the form of their chosen bird. The mythic animal associated with Acanthus is the unicorn, portrayed as both the gentle creature of purity and healing and the bold, horned caretaker and enforcer of virtue.

The colors green and blue belong to the Realm of Acanthus, as does the emerald. Blue is the color of the sky and is as often associated with air as with water. Green is associated with vegetation, and green plants produce the oxygen that enriches the planet's air. These two colors are also associated with the Realm of faerie because of their essential "lightness." Both green and blue are colors of hope and success, and refer to the brighter side of Acanthus. The bramble's association with Acanthus comes directly from its Watchtower and from the Path of Thistle. The path toward the Watchtower of Time and Fate is not without its struggles and its pain, but both struggle and pain come from natural sources.

Other associations with the Path of Acanthus are the fragrance of cedar wood, the resilience and durability of wool and the sweet succulence of fruit. Cedar is one of the most fragrant of woods, its aroma carried on the air and lingering within the wood itself. Wool, in its original form, bears the appearance of fleecy clouds, yet its strength and warmth derive from the patterns in its weaving. Fruit is the traditional meat and drink of the Fae and often associated with faeries. Fruit also has a slight taint of "the forbidden," such as the fruit eaten by Adam and Eve or the pomegranate seeds consumed by Persephone during her stay in Hades. Thus, fruit may symbolize the darker side of Acanthus, its sinister aspects hidden beneath its sweet, refreshing taste.

The vehicle associated with Acanthus is the ship, primarily the sailing ship, whose vast sails require a strong wind for smooth sailing. Ships also set sail for exotic places, trusting their success or failure to the ocean and the winds. The great explorations of the world were first accomplished by mariners: the Phoenicians and the Vikings, the sailors of the South Seas and, later, the named explorers such as Columbus, Magellan, da Gama and others. The element of risk is a great factor in exploration in general, and in explorations by ship across uncharted oceans in particular.

Glimpses of a Higher World

Throughout the centuries since the fall of Atlantis and the rise of the Fallen World, intimations of magic and the mysteries of the higher world have penetrated the minds of Sleepers, giving them hints of the glories once known to humanity. These brief meetings with the Supernal Realm have given rise to forms of religious, spiritual and occult expression in Sleeper society as those who cannot touch magic nevertheless attempt to claim a share of it. The magic associated with the Path of Acanthus has inseminated the world in many ways, as the concepts of time and fate — as well as the role of the enchanter — still exercise great control over the beliefs of Sleepers.

Hellenic Magic and the Eleusinian Mysteries

The Greek myths and legends show an obsession with Fate, with the swearing and breaking of oaths and with the destinies under which heroes are born and which, ultimately, bring about their deaths. The awe and fear surrounding stories of the Three Fates or Moirai — Clotho, the spinner; Lachesis, the measurer; Atropos, the cutter — bear testimony to the importance the ancient Greeks placed on destiny, or Fate.

Where Fate is a factor, prophesy looms large. The Oracle at Delphi, the most famous of the Greek oracles, was consulted by people from all over the known world. The Delphic Oracle figures prominently in Greek tragedy as well; according to Sophocles's *Oedipus* cycle, Oedipus consults the Delphic Oracle and learns that he will kill his father and sleep with his mother, thus launching him on his course to greatness and death.

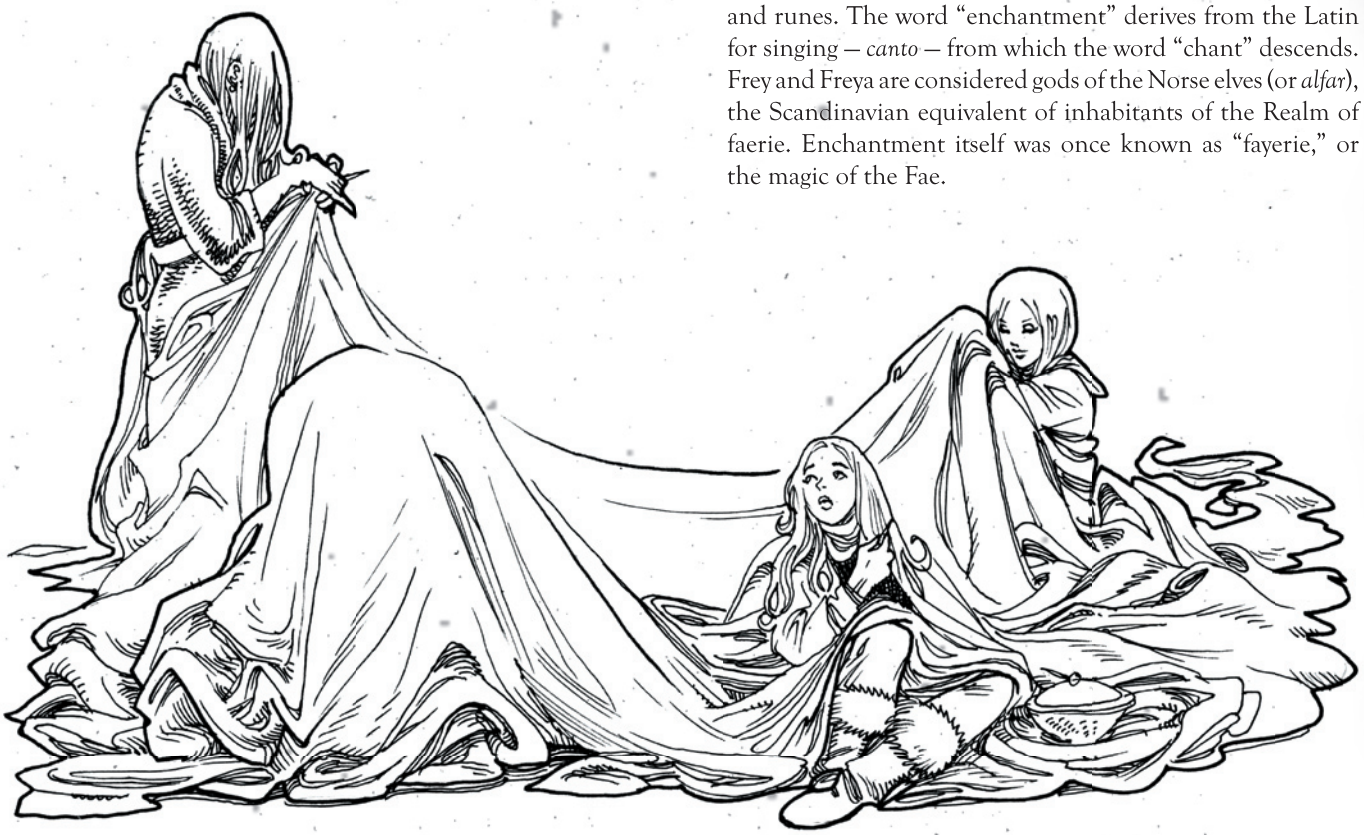
The Eleusinian Mysteries, dedicated to Demeter, used vision-inducing practices to transform followers into the Epoptai or "those who had seen." That these Epoptai were granted a peek into the higher reality of the Supernal World might explain the popularity and the secrecy surrounding their practices.

Celtic Magic and Druidism

The ancient Celts relied on Fate and Time for their yearly religious practices. Many of their stone constructions, or dolmens, existed in order to pinpoint certain times of year they held sacred — such as the summer and winter solstices and the autumnal and vernal equinoxes. Signs and omens were used to choose the favorites of the gods or their sacrifices. The druids, who were the priests, bards and lorekeepers of Celtic mysticism, relied heavily on timing in their practices, since they venerated the cycles of death and rebirth, feast and famine, waking and sleeping that characterized the ebb and flow of natural forces. The idea of the sacrifice of the Winter King, a ritual death played out in the tale of Arthur and many other Celtic myths, incorporates the darker side of both Fate and Time. The Goddess' consort, young in the Spring and Summer, ages as the year reaches its end. Since the King is dedicated to the land, the land also ages and only the King's blood and his death can revive the earth and make way for the new King.

Norse Magic and the Vanir

The Vanir, the elder gods of the Norse pantheon, epitomized the aspects of fertility, nature and eroticism. Gentler than the war-obsessed Aesir, the Vanir are also associated with the Fae and with the magic of enchantment. Bragi, the Norse god of poetry and eloquence, as well as the siblings Frey and Freya, have particular associations with the magic of enchantment and runes. The word "enchantment" derives from the Latin for singing — *canto* — from which the word "chant" descends. Frey and Freya are considered gods of the Norse elves (or *alfar*), the Scandinavian equivalent of inhabitants of the Realm of faerie. Enchantment itself was once known as "fayerie," or the magic of the Fae.



European Witchcraft

The witches or "wise men and women" of Europe practiced a religion and a form of magic that focused heavily on enchantments and curses, as well as prophecies. Though many witches in Europe practiced the healing arts and were expert herbalists, they were popularly known for their ability to "bewitch" or enchant others through the use of potions and charms. Many witches worshiped gods of nature: the threefold goddess (not unlike the Three Fates), the horned god of the hunt, whose faerie equivalent leads the Wild Hunt, and elemental gods and goddesses. The persecution and near-eradication of European witches in the later Middle Ages had, perhaps, as much to do with their ability to touch the eyes and hearts of mortals with glimpses of the Supernal World as it did with their pagan (i.e., non–Christian) beliefs and their economic status as independent, landholders. There was a dark side to these witches, however, since their herbal knowledge also made them expert brewers of poisons as well as love potions.

Hermetic Magic

Hermetic magic as practiced in the 18th and 19th century owes much to the reawakening of interest in the occult, spiritualism and ritual magic. Though symbols more closely related to Moros and Mastigos found their window onto the world through the séances and death-fascinations of spiritualism, many occult symbols relating to Acanthus broke through the obfuscating fog that clouded the minds of Sleepers. The use of runes, Tarot cards and other methods of telling the future call forth hints of magic that touches the Fate Arcanum, while the reawakening of interest in Arthurian legends (particularly those of Merlin, the Enchanter) brought to the fore a fascination with Arcadia, or the world of faerie.

Walking the Winding Path

Followers of the Path of Acanthus display great variety in their appearance, their life choices, the feel of their magic and the places they choose for their sanctums. However, they do tend to share some common qualities which, while not readily apparent, mark them unmistakably as belonging to the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn. Sleepers cannot distinguish Acanthus mages from the crowd, except for a faint, indefinable air of attraction common to many who practice magic; those who have eyes to see, know them immediately.

Appearance

Acanthus mages come in all shapes and sizes, all ages and ethnic groups. Their age groups range from precocious prepubescents to venerable senior citizens. They include individuals in superb physical condition and those who have moderate or even severe physical disabilities. Acanthus mages represent all social and economic classes and all degrees of education.

What they have in common, however, is a certain "flair" for the dramatic in their actions, a slightly otherworldly air, an attitude that can best be described as "fey" and a sometimes dreamy, always timeless look in their eyes. Acanthus mages are usually physically attractive or personally charismatic. They draw other people to them like magnets, though these mages are seemingly unaware of their personal charm.

Where some Paths may cause Sleepers to feel intimidated or fearful, Acanthus mages bring a zest for life to their surroundings. Sleepers in the proximity of Acanthus mages are more likely to take risks or perceive time differently. Unless they deliberately "dumb themselves down," Acanthus mages are likely to be the center of attention. (This natural flamboyance often acts as a camouflage for their magic. Sleepers are less likely to question odd occurrences around Acanthus mages, since the Sleepers expect these extroverts to put on a "show.")

Acanthus mages also seem to age differently from both Sleepers and mages of different Paths. Time treats Acanthus mages more gently than it does most people, and followers of the Path of the Thistle tend to look much younger than their chronological age.

Followers of the Acanthus Path often dress in clothes that hint at their connection with Arcadia. Unlike many mages of more subtle or somber Paths, Acanthus mages typically enjoy dressing in colors — either in bright, flamboyant primaries or in more subtle but just as interesting pastels and muted tones. The key to their dress is style. Even when dressed entirely in black, it is hard for an Acanthus mage to look grim or "gothic." They often adorn themselves with jewelry chosen for color or contrast rather than value; hand-beaded necklaces of amber and tiger-eye please them as much as diamonds or other precious gems. Flowing sashes, scarves or vests made from velvets, lace, silk, gauze or other soft, sensuous materials are natural accessories for Arcadian mages. Hairstyle more often tends to long and flowing (for both men and women) rather than stylish power-cuts, though spiked, dyed and tousled haircuts are frequently found on younger, hipper Acanthus mages.

Since many Acanthus mages rise from the ranks of performers and artists, they often dress the part. Attending Renaissance Faires and other "dress-up" occasions in full costume offers them a chance to display their passion for expressing themselves. So what if an Acanthus mage shows up at a Halloween Ball dressed as Merlin the magician or the sorceress Morgan Le Fay? After all, it's only a costume!

Nimbus

The nimbus of an Acanthus mage, like her appearance, is "fey." Words commonly associated with the world of faerie — gossamer, mist, glowing, luminescent, feathery, timeless, otherworldly — partially describe the physical appearance of these mages' nimbuses. Particularly when an Acanthus mage

uses the Time Arcanum, the time sense of those around the mage seems to alter, and the nimbus itself interacts with time in unexpected and often startling ways. Likewise, the Fate Arcanum injects an element of chance into the nimbus, as if the aura surrounding the mage had suddenly become infused with all the potentially possible variations.

While a mage usually has a singular nimbus by which his magic can be recognized by a practiced eye, there are often slight variations within an individual's nimbus manifestations depending on the type and intensity of the magic being cast.

For example, Animbé's nimbus in general may appear as an aura of soft, glowing blue light with hints of tiny motes of brilliance winking in and out circling around her. When casting spells involving the Fate Arcanum, the bright motes may acquire a random firing or circle wildly around Animbé while emitting different colors of light. The Time Arcanum might cause this same nimbus to appear frozen in time for several heartbeats before resuming its circular movement. Greater degrees of magic would accentuate the nimbus' qualities according to the type of magic used.

Sample Nimbuses

Concepts for Acanthus character's nimbuses can come from any object or word associated with the Path's ruling Arcana, Time and Fate, or related to Arcadia, the world of faerie, the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn or anything else called to mind by associations with the Path of Thistle. Within these concepts, the nimbus may vary in accordance with the kinds or intensity of magic used.

Mage: The Awakening presents a comprehensive description of an Acanthus nimbus focused on the idea of "fey." A few other examples of Acanthus-related nimbuses are described here as a jumping off point for players to tailor their own characters' magical aura when casting spells.

Changeable: A visual light show appears, complete with exploding fireworks, changing colors and kaleidoscopic repetitions of visual elements. Sounds become intensified in their variations — loud sounds become louder and soft noises fade to near inaudibility, only to trade places so that soft becomes loud and loud soft. Strange music sometimes accompanies this effect, providing a melody that never resolves but is always turning into some other song. Powerful magic adds even more variations and more intense sensations. Viewers stand in awe of the light and sound spectacle.

Ethereal: An otherworldly sensation surrounds the caster. Objects nearby seem either transparent or translucent, and everything has a sheen of unearthly grandeur. Junk cars do not change their appearance, but are nevertheless transformed into iridescent visions. Music reminiscent of an angelic choir — or a faerie chorus — rises and falls in swells of unbearable sweetness and inescapable sadness. Everyone nearby becomes aware of their own fragility, of how their lives hang on each heartbeat and of how delicate the balance of their existence truly is. It is as if a strong breath could blow the world away. Strong magic heightens this sensation, making others feel the aching beauty of something just beyond their grasp.

Fated: All seems predetermined. Sights and sounds are perceived with a sense of fatality, as if they had been set into stone long ago. Voices murmur indistinguishably in the background, sounding like a Greek chorus announcing a hero's unhappy fate or else a judge pronouncing sentence. Colors are somber without being dark; there are no half-tones or graduated hues. Rather, each color is shown in its coldest, most fixed state — slate gray, deep crimson, royal purple, dark green — lacking any true shine or sheen. Strong power reinforces the sense of predetermination, until those nearby feel as if they can do nothing spontaneous, as if every action they take has already been played out on some gigantic stage. A variant nimbus includes shadowy women's faces that might be interpreted as the Three Fates or the Triune-goddess.

Fortune-Telling: Similar to the "Fated" nimbus in theme, but less fixed and incorporating chance and randomness, this nimbus creates an area around its caster in which everything seems possible, but only one outcome is certain. Images of cards, rune-stones, dice, bones and other vehicles for reading fortunes pass in and out of the viewer's sight. Sometimes, it seems as if a fortune might become clear, but, at the last minute, the final element of the prophecy fades. Carnival music often accompanies this nimbus. Strong magic causes the nimbus to appear solid and transparent around its edges, as if the mage were enclosed within a giant crystal ball. Anyone in proximity to the caster feels as if all the certainties of his life were suddenly stripped away, leaving a sensation of intermingled fright and excitement.

Fractals: The patterns of the world present themselves within the nimbus, displaying an ever-shifting, seemingly random sequence of shapes and forms always in motion. After staring at the procession of forms, a sort of pattern emerges, though not one that can be determined by hard-and-fast formulae. The particular Arcanum used at the time controls the visual form of the fractal pattern: the Life Arcanum may produce shifting figures of molecules or recombinant DNA or images of bees swarming in changing formations; Forces may reveal snowflakes, lava flows, patterns of shifting sands or a meteorite display. The stronger the magic, the more intense the shapes and the faster they move. Anyone near the caster senses that the world is truly composed of many parts, and those parts, in turn, are made of smaller parts . . . .

Misleading: Nothing is as it seems. This nimbus displays a series of optical illusions, from twisting Möbius strips of light to figure-versus-ground arrays or Escherian landscapes. Just when the brain makes sense of what it perceives, the scene suddenly inverts itself or emphasizes a small detail that shifts the visual focus so that a completely different image forms.

This process continues in a never-ending progression. Stronger magic enhances the contrasts, exerting an almost hypnotic effect on the viewer. Anyone close to the caster experiences a sense that her perceptions are forever changed and is filled with mistrust at first impressions.

Nature: The link between Arcadia, the Fae and the natural world reveals itself in this nimbus. A heady incense of blossoms and other natural scents infuses the air around the caster. The nimbus itself appears as a circle of leaves, flowers, twigs, thorns, shells or other nature-related images. Stronger magic brings out the colors of the images and heightens the scents so that they seem to cling to the skin. Anyone standing near the caster feels a dusting of feathers or the spray of salt water or some other physical sensation associated with natural objects.

Surreal: This nimbus presents images similar to those that might be found by stepping "through the looking glass," walking into a painting by Hieronymus Bosch or experiencing the effect of certain mind-altering chemicals. The outer edges of the nimbus are ill-defined, so that the "real" world blends almost seamlessly into the nimbus, extending the sense of un- or ultra-reality beyond the immediate vicinity of the caster. The more powerful the magic, the sharper the images become. Those near the caster feel as if they have lost control of their visual processing centers and that they are unable to make sense of what they are seeing. (Those who regularly experience acid flashes may not feel quite as disoriented as others.)

Time Effects: Though some nimbuses may include sensations of extended time or other temporal effects, this nimbus uses time as its primary symbology. Some of these nimbuses appear as giant clock faces, with the caster in the center, or as numerous tiny clocks circling the caster. Other visual effects may include the images of infants aging to adults, growing old and dying only to transform into a fetus *in utero* and begin the process all over or the procession of the seasons. Strong magic may speed up or slow down the process. Anyone in proximity feels time distort around them, either moving in slow motion, fast forward or stop action. Often, the sound of clocks ticking or hearts beating accompanies the visual effects.

Whimsical: This nimbus may develop a cartoonish feel, becoming two-dimensional and incorporating animated creatures within its confines. It may also portray images from circuses, carnivals or other symbols of entertainment and imagination. Though the initial images may appear "sweet" or "cute," a feeling of manic madness prevents them from becoming cloying. Strong magic increases the madness quotient. Eerie carnival music or mad music-box tunes fill the ears of anyone standing near the caster.



Sanctums

Like mages of other Paths, Acanthus mages see their sanctums as places of safety and refreshment, where they can retrench, rebuild their Mana and study their art in a suitable environment. Thistle mages' definitions of "safety," "refreshment" and "suitable environment," however, often differ sharply from that of their fellow mages aligned with other Watchtowers. Acanthus mages enjoy the company of others, other mages and Sleepers alike, and tend to have their sanctums in or near places that generally attract groups. Often these locations are associated with types of recreation, either of a creative type, a playful nature or else dedicated to randomness.

Acanthus mages are seldom troubled by people in groups. These mages enjoy the camaraderie and are firm believers in the principle of "hiding in plain sight." Many of their sanctums exist right under the noses of Sleeper society. Mages of Time and Fate realize that they can often uncover a Hallow near a place where people have gathered to celebrate or re-enact rituals or feasts. These mages know that over time, a place used over and over again for the placing of bets or casting of lots can become a Mana-magnet for magical energies associated with chance and randomness. Acanthus mages sometimes choose areas with historical significance, knowing that the weight of history often brings many times together in one spot.

Places where oaths are sworn, particularly those tinged with joy and commitment, prove popular sanctums for some Acanthus mages. And, at other times, Acanthus mages will be drawn to certain spots for sanctums through the vagaries of chance. A few examples of likely sanctums for Acanthus Path mages are presented as guidelines when choosing a sanctum for an Acanthus character or Storyteller character.

Artists' Colony

Places where painters, sculptors, crafters, artisans and other creative individuals congregate are natural habitats for followers of the Acanthus Path. The Arcadian-based Watchtower imbues most of its mages with some sort of artistic creativity, even if only a keen appreciation of art. Artists' colonies present ideal locations for Acanthus mages to establish a sanctum. Artists generally appreciate the need for privacy, so mages can withdraw for their magical workings without causing raised eyebrows from their neighbors. The high level of creativity tends to generate its own energy, providing Mana that resonates with inspiration and a creative impetus.

Best of all, if any of the artists discover the true nature of their Acanthus neighbors, they are more likely to accept and support the mages rather than shun them or drive them out. One of the best examples of "hiding in plain sight," an artists' colony may also conceal a cabal's group sanctum, particularly if one or more of the member mages belongs to the Path of Acanthus.

Bookie's Headquarters

Not all Acanthus mages are paragons of virtue. Many of them fall on the "wrong side" of the moral or ethical track and find themselves ensconced in the business of petty crime, or else find themselves most comfortable around the subculture of people who exist outside the law. For masters of Fate, the art of "bookmaking," or calculating the odds and taking bets, whether legal or illegal, seems a natural proclivity. Besides, what better security could a mage have than a fortified back room in a basement apartment in a three-story walk-up with a pair of burly stooges armed with passwords and semi-automatics? This is obviously not the life for every Acanthus mage, but for those who like their Mana spiced with danger and the thrill of dodging the authorities, the odds of finding safety and privacy are good.

Casino

Gambling houses, casinos and other places where legal betting and games of chance take place are almost too perfect as sanctums for Acanthus mages. These modern temples to Fate generate large quantities of random energy that gives an unpredictable twinge to any nearby sources of Mana, thus making the magical energy particularly suited to followers of the Path of the Thistle. The many Sleepers who frequent such places act as buffers between the mages and the larger Sleeper world, since anyone who gambles holds some belief that luck will favor him this time and many gamblers practice superstitious rituals when they gamble to ensure their luck. These "superstitions" help create an atmosphere where true magic often goes undetected. Sanctums housed within casinos usually occupy rooms above or below the actual gambling house. Often, an Acanthus mage is the owner or manager of the establishment, and many of the staff are either cabal members or Sleepwalker allies. Casinos and other types of gambling houses illustrate the dual nature of Acanthus. While most people either win or lose small amounts of money, others win big and lose big. The dangers of the compulsive gambler or the suicidal impulses of someone who has lost everything in a game of "double or nothing" comprise the other side of Games of Fate and Chance.

Clock Shop

The idea of surrounding themselves with timepieces appeals to some Acanthus mages, who seek to make their sanctums in the midst of the marketplace. Whether a quaint shop in a small village or a storefront shop in a supermall, the shop's doorway marks the entry into another world, one ruled by different laws and subject to its own internal logic. Many Acanthus mages, particularly those drawn to the order of the Adamantine Arrow or the Silver Ladder, appreciate the orderly precision of hundreds of clocks ticking simultaneously — and a master of Time can attune many clocks to within a millisecond of each

other. Others, predominantly among the Free Council, enjoy the arbitrariness of human-made time and deliberately set their store clocks at odds with one another, leaving it up to the individual to determine which time is the "right" time.

Magic Shop

Many Acanthus willworkers are drawn to the trickster-world of stage magic, and a good proportion of these mages make their living in the Sleeper world as performing magicians, concentrating on either close-up work or large-scale illusions. Small towns often boast their local magicians, men and women who take their magic to restaurants and small theatres, schools and birthday parties. Some of these mages own magic shops where they sell pre-packaged tricks or stage props such as flash powders, folding daggers and the ubiquitous black silk scarves. A back room serves as a place for magicians to give "magic lessons" to prospective students and, in the process, to weed out those with potential for true magic from Sleepers with an interest in the world of magic tricks. Sometimes, a mage may have living quarters over the shop for herself or even her entire cabal, all of whom are usually associated with the shop in some way. These places are usually easily defended when necessary, but they are of necessity small and cramped quarters for more than a few mages at a time.

Nightclub

Acanthus mages are never averse to a good time, even if — especially if — that good time sometimes involves risk or outright danger. Nightclubs of any kind, from the upscale hot spots to trendy celebrity-hangouts to specialty or fetish clubs to places only hardcore gamblers and inveterate losers can stomach form popular candidates for Acanthus sanctums. The desperate search for entertainment (some of it provided by the mages in residence) fills the atmosphere with a restless energy replete with risk, danger, understated violence and adrenalin — a perfect "vibe" for an Acanthus mage. Many of these nightspots sit on Hallows. This correlation is thought to have something to do with locating a club on a site that normally attracts people. Often, even Sleepers are inexplicably drawn to certain places that "feel" good, bad or charged with a high level of kinetic or magnetic energy. Those who explore the past of many nightclub sites uncover some connection to the Supernal World—hence, a Hallow. Acanthus mages are usually the quickest to take advantage of the opportunity, since they can often do their own past-time searches. Sometimes Thistle mages are silent (and invisible) owners, who rarely show their faces but exist in back rooms and upstairs lounges, replenishing themselves with the energy all around them. More often, these mages make themselves intimate parts of the club, either as performers, bartenders, emcees or in some other capacity that allows them to control the flow of excitement and energy and, if necessary, nip it in the bud. Always unpredictable in night-to-night activities, nightclubs and dance halls appeal to Path mages who like to mix their risk-taking with a good party.

Racetrack

With emphasis on betting and odds-making, racetracks are natural environments for followers of the Path of the Thistle. Whether involving horses, dogs or cars, these temples to speed, glory and broken dreams hold within them an essential drama and an overwhelmingly allegorical message. In racing, nothing matters except the end result, and the goal is to reach the finish line ahead of the others. Sometimes, racers simply lose; other times, they break bones or crash into retaining walls. Occasionally, they die trying. Racetracks make ideal areas for cabals of mages from mixed Paths, in which at least one is an Acanthus. The death energy of Moros, the harnessed chaos of Mastigos, the competitive edge of Obrimos and the animal energy of Thyrsus all combine well with Acanthus' mixture of Time and Fate in an environment that can flavor any Mana with the tang of danger. Few people intrude on racing grounds unless a race is scheduled, so the opportunities for study and private workings of magic are sufficient. Racetracks also have separate public and private areas, making them defensible when needed.

Renaissance Faire

Acanthus mages find the Renaissance Faire circuit a good way to combine their love for pageantry and costume with their enjoyment of trickery and entertainment. An RV usually serves as a mobile sanctum during the Faire's traveling season. Some Faires have a permanent location; Acanthus mages lucky enough to associate themselves with one of these Renaissance groups can usually find houses or some other type of lodging to use as sanctums. Like other public-oriented places, a Renaissance Faire's physical area may be hard to defend. On the other hand, there are so many distractions and activities going on that searching out the presence of a mage would be difficult at best. The very openness provides its own form of defense. In addition, the close community of Faire performers and vendors makes it difficult for anyone to gain access to the inner circle. Path mages ensconced inside a Renaissance Faire often have Sleepwalkers chosen from the Faire personnel.

Theatre

Almost every town of any size has a community theatre; these places usually have their own headquarters, complete with stage, backstage area, offices and even rooms suitable for living quarters. A local theatre makes a good sanctum for an Acanthus mage who enjoys performing. Path mages who seek out sanctums of this sort are generally more flamboyant and emotive than some of their fellow mages. Theatre buildings generally have decent security because of the many costumes and permanent props stored in the theatre. While community

theatres generally pull their actors from the general public, a high percentage of backstage crew members are either mages or Sleepwalkers.

Rites

The rites practiced by mages on the Path of the Thistle serve to remind them of their ties to Time and Fate as well as to their spiritual home, Arcadia. Most Acanthus mages perform many of these activities in the course of their day-to-day activities, but, when done as oblations, the rites enable the mages to draw Mana from Hallows and reaffirm their dedication to their Path.

Oblations

The following practices are performed at Hallows. Though used to extract Mana, oblations have a more important role, in some ways, by helping the mage focus on some of the key activities connected to her Path. For many Acanthus mages, these oblations are merely formalized acknowledgements of "normal" activities.

Taking or Making Bets

If an Acanthus mage did not gamble before Awakening, he soon learns to participate in games of chance as a key element in understanding the Fate Arcanum. The art of making odds and the science of betting help clear the mage's mind and help him learn a new way of assessing the world before him.

Racing Against Time

Many schoolchildren grow up taking timed tests or watching game shows on television in which the object of the game is to perform an action within a certain amount of time. Acanthus mages often participate in such activities as a way of becoming conscious of the constant passage of time. Traversing the perimeter of a Hallow in a predesignated amount of time, completing a series of actions or exercises within a time limit or participating in racing meets all count as oblations when performed in the proximity of a Hallow.

Telling Fortunes or Having One's Fortune Told

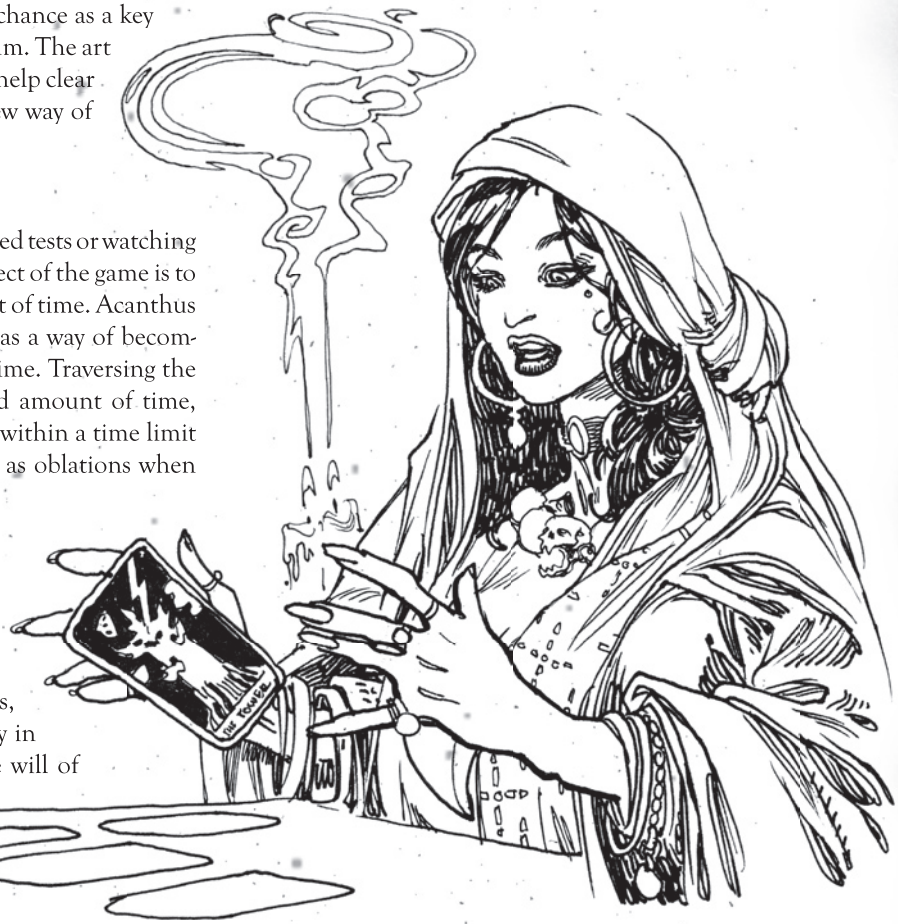
By participating in fortune-telling, either through the use of Tarot cards, tea leaves, runes, coins or other similar means, the Acanthus mage places herself squarely in Fortune's path, submitting herself to the will of Fate, or, if she is the fortune-teller, becoming the vessel of Fate. In the case of performing an oblation, the actual fortune is not as important as the act of fortune-telling.

Burying a Time Capsule

Placing items of a personal nature or of significance to the mage in an airtight container and burying it for a specified amount of time (at least a year, perhaps longer) is a way of manifesting faith in the future and in the passage of time. Occasionally, a mage will include a photograph of someone close to him and write down wishes for that person's health or success, trusting to time to bring about the desired effect. Other times, the time capsule may contain things such as an award, a class ring, dried flowers from a funeral or wedding or a letter from the mage to himself.

Taking or Witnessing an Oath

The Fate Arcanum governs the act of binding persons or things together through oaths. As an appropriate oblation, some Acanthus mages will swear an oath at a Hallow to reinforce their respect for the power of words to forge unshakeable links. Witnessing an oath at a Hallows has a similar effect. Occasionally, a pair of Acanthus mages will visit a Hallows together and act as witnesses to oaths sworn by each other.



Risk-Taking

Just as gambling is a form of trusting Fate, so is risk-taking. Some Acanthus seek to prove their trust in the Arcanum that rules their Path by undertaking tasks or activities that contain an element of risk. A Hallow atop a cliff may be the location of paragliding or rappelling. Underground Hallows may require a cave exploration. For Acanthus mages with a daredevil streak, these oblations are also recreational and even meditative in nature.

Dedications

Dedications for Acanthus mages are both appropriate and problematic. Most Acanthus mages tend toward a rejection of sameness in their lives. A vow that requires an Acanthus mage to uphold one principle continuously goes against the changeable nature common to Acanthus. Most dedications for mages of the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn incorporate some flexibility within them so that change is an integral part of the vows.

Some examples of typical dedications are presented below. These are by no means exclusive, but they are intended to provide some ideas for expanding the possible types of dedications.

Vow of Omens

Since the first humans walked the earth, wise men and women have foretold the future through their powers of observation. The pattern of a bird's flight, where a bolt of lightning hits the earth, the sight of a dead animal before sunrise — all these signs indicated whether or not certain things would be likely to happen or whether good or ill luck would befall the person seeing the omen (or the tribe to which that person belonged).

In taking the vow of omens, the Acanthus mage dedicates himself to living his life and making his decisions based on the omens he reads in the world around him. A decision about buying a car might hinge on a pair of ravens sitting on the hood of one car while a gray cat sits in the shade beneath another car. The mage thus puts logic aside and chooses his actions based on what the omens portend.

Vow of Wandering

Like the Fool of the Tarot who sets out on a journey to anywhere and nowhere, the Acanthus mage takes a vow to live a life on the move. This can entail either undertaking a cross-country trek or simply refraining from having a permanent home in his base city. Acanthus mages following this dedication stay with friends, change their sleeping place every few days, or else rent motel or hotel rooms, stay in hostels or camp out in an RV or a tent.

The purpose of this dedication is to help the mage see that Fate is a powerful Arcanum, one that can, in fact, support a mage by providing shelter of some kind. The mage learns to put his trust in Fate and not rely on permanency to provide security.

Vow of Trickery

Acanthus mages with a cynical or sinister bent sometimes take this dedication, which requires them to use deception, chicanery, insinuation and other dirty tricks in their interactions with Sleepers and even with other mages. A mage following the vow of trickery never does anything in a straightforward manner that can't be done in a more byzantine or convoluted fashion. Lying, exaggerating, withholding information, cheating and similar pursuits are all standard actions for these mages.

Where many see Acanthus mages as carefree and lighthearted, this dedication tends to prove them wrong. Very often those who are "care-free" have become that way by not caring whom they trample on their journey through life.

Vow of Time

The mage who takes this dedication must arrange her life according to a strict schedule, awakening at the same time every morning, spending so much time exercising or studying, making certain she is never late for meetings, recreational activities and other appointments and, in general, making certain that there is a time for everything and nothing happens outside its proper time. Typically, the oath for this dedication comes with a built-in timeframe and is usually taken for no longer than three months.

Vow of Chance

Also known as the Gambler's Dedication, this dedication requires the mage to accept any and all opportunities to test his fortune against the odds. Mages who swear a vow of chance usually participate in regular poker nights, make pilgrimages to Atlantic City and Las Vegas, buy lottery tickets whenever they come across them, enter sweepstakes and other contests, attend local bingo nights and regularly bet on the outcomes of sporting events. Most of the time, mages do not use their magic to tweak the odds, though that practice is not specifically forbidden by the vow.

This is another way for an Acanthus mage to manifest his trust in the Fate Arcanum and the principles of Probability and Change.

Society

Mages do not exist in vacuums, and Acanthus mages, in particular, have a hard time without the company of others, either mages or Sleepers. Although Acanthus mages may have some of the least structured approaches to their fellow mages on the Path, they have a great desire to connect with other mages of any Path.

Forums

Forums for members of the Path of Acanthus usually lack formal structure. In fact, a strong anti-authoritarian streak runs through the ranks of these Time and Fate mages. There is a distinct lack of hierarchy among Thistle Path mages, with deference generally given only by a student to a mentor. Leaders within the Acanthus fellowship are determined largely by personal charisma, rather than length of time since Awakening or ranking in Arcana.

Forums usually take place in public places, though often in private areas within those places. Back rooms in nightclubs or private lounges in convention centers are ideal locations for a caucus of Acanthus mages. Customs are few and simple.

Most forums start out with a general greeting and some unstructured time for socializing and catching up with events in the lives of the individual mages. During this period, mages with something to discuss manage to make their desires known to one of the mages who is acting as "host." By unspoken agreement, the social hour comes to an end and certain individuals present their issues to the group.

If a decision is not immediately forthcoming, the attending mages participate in freewheeling large and small group discussions. Eventually a decision is made, but sometimes several forums are needed to reach a consensus.

Meetings generally mean food and drink aplenty. Many Acanthus mages enjoy preparing their own foods, and some forums turn into pie-tasting contests, spicy chili runoffs and potluck meals. Entertainment, including storytelling and performances, also forms an important part of all but the most serious of forums. At some point during the gathering, new mages are introduced and announcements are made. Games of chance and betting games such as poker and roulette conclude the forums.

Paths

Each Path has its own presuppositions about other Paths, not all of them complementary and most of them at least partly incorrect. These stereotypical reactions serve as a guideline for players to use when their characters first confront someone from another Path. Not all Paths get along even after repeated attempts, but usually some common ground can eventually present itself. In many cases, Acanthus mages have a more accepting attitude toward mages of other Paths than some of the other Paths, but these Time and Fate mages, too, are capable of unreasoning prejudice until proven wrong. This section looks at the most prevalent take on each of the Paths by followers of the Path of Acanthus. This position is presented first. Following it, a dissenting opinion gives a sometimes contradictory view of these Paths.

Mastigos

The Warlocks know risk-taking, for they risk insanity with many of their dealings. They are difficult to befriend, for they tend to think primarily of themselves, valuing their individuality over many other things. For them, the good of the one supersedes the good of the many. The ruling Arcana of this Path are two of the most fraught with danger: Mind and Space. Where Acanthus mages sometimes use trickery and chicanery to gain the advantage, the Mastigos use far more sophisticated methods of deception, working on the minds and hearts of their victims, convincing them that demons are out to get them or that they are going crazy. Warlocks' tendency to be more violent, cruel and self-serving than the other Paths places the Mastigos often at odds with the Acanthus's more amenable and less harsh approach. What many Acanthus mages do not want to admit is that they, too, just as the Mastigos, can become harsh and callous in their approach to others.

Dissenting View

The sheer power and energy that impels followers of the Path of Mastigos is something to be envied and desired. They play with dangerous toys, but who is to say that Space and Mind are any more risky than Fate and Time? While these mages possess the capacity for great evil, by the same token they also possess the potential for great good. They represent the will to survive and seize the victory that too many mages have lost. When properly approached with an understanding of both their strengths and limitations, a Mastigos mage can often prove an invigorating and challenging companion who will make you test — and often exceed — your own personal and magical limitations.

Moros

These are usually the most dour of mages, obsessed with Death and other dark adventures. They often take themselves too seriously with their dark clothes and somber demeanor. Their ruling Arcana, Death and Matter, are perhaps two of the most demanding forms of magic, beset with rules and limitations that must be taken into account at all times. No wonder they seem to have so little time for laughter and "frivolities." They feel the literal weight of the world on their shoulders. They see everything as dying all the time: organic matter slows down and ages while inorganic, non-living matter eventually falls prey to the implacability of entropy. Where Moros mages often arouse an attitude of aridity and sterility in others, they also deliver a universal message of strength in the face of adversity. That they seem to lack humor makes them objects of pity.

Dissenting View

The last thing a Moros Path mage wants is to wear the label of stodginess. When not involved in the business of magic, many Moros entertain themselves by telling stories and jokes made by their own Pathmates. They are capable of relaxing, but their dedication often makes them see no benefit in personal ease. These mages make good companions, as they are able to place members of their groups at ease with their dry senses of humor and their steadfastness in times of crisis.

Obrimos

The Obrimos lack flexibility in both their approach to magic and their approach to living the life of a mage. Just because something was successful once doesn't mean it will always work. Their affinity for the otherworldly energies and the essential energy of magic gives them some clout to back up their convictions, but their closed-mindedness and refusal to change once their minds are made up hampers them in many situations. They claim to stand for justice and good, but they also claim the right to define those terms. All this wouldn't be so bad if so many of them didn't insist on others submitting to their judgment. They truly believe that they are divinely inspired, whether by God, Buddha or some Great Master of Intelligent Design, and they expect others to fall in line behind them. They need to change their expectations.

Dissenting View

Acanthus mages are known for their adaptability and willingness to embrace change. It is good for a counterforce to exist lest magic become unbalanced. Obrimos also brings a sense of holiness to magic that reminds other mages of the seed of Awakening. Their main flaw is not their rigidity, but their lack of fun and their need to take everything so seriously!

Thyrsus

The feral nature of these mages of healing and spirit may seem too raw and too intense for some. They complement Acanthus with their visceral touch in counterpoint to Acanthus' ethereal approach. Like the beasts the Thyrsus emulate and attune themselves to, they give their loyalty forever. They are also as ferocious and instinctive as the animals they study. Their closeness to nature and the spirit world can make them seem a little "odd," but they hold no exclusive rights to insanity. They make staunch allies and occasionally know how to let their hair down and celebrate life.

Dissenting View

Thyrsus mages are more dangerous than they would have us believe. They wield the power of healing, but they can also harm or withhold their healing touch. They know the magic of spirit, and they can use this for either good or evil. They would like to be underestimated, but they need to be understood in their potential for turning against those who disagree with them.

Orders

Acanthus mages belong to all five of the orders and tend to exist well within each of them, a testament to their legendary adaptability. Each order has its own view of the weaknesses and strengths of the Acanthus Path. This section looks at the views each order holds toward the mages of the Path of the Thistle.

Adamantine Arrow

The Adamantine Arrow recognizes that Acanthus mages are not always the most warlike of willworkers. Nevertheless, this militant order appreciates the advantage in having mages who deal in fate, the odds and timing — all of which are essential factors to have on one's side in a battle. While Arrows may consider Acanthus mages to be flighty and fickle, the Arrow also knows that spontaneity sometimes acts as the deciding factor in a battle. With an Acanthus mage in a position of leadership — a position the Acanthus adapt to readily since they are loathe to follow — an element of unpredictability enters into the tactical scheme and throws the advantage toward the side with the unpredictable element.

Acanthus mages also serve the Arrow as scouts or as double agents, able to infiltrate rival groups or even enemies such as the Seers of the Throne and charm them out of secrets or discover tactical weaknesses. As support personnel, Acanthus excel at stacking the odds in favor of the Arrow. So long as the Adamantine Arrow can keep their Acanthus members from becoming bored with the idea of perpetual alertness and battle-readiness, the followers of the Path of the Thistle can thrive among the warriors of Atlantis.

Free Council

The Free Council eagerly welcomes Acanthus mages since these willworkers are only too ready to try new things and enjoy the challenge of using their magic with a modern spin. Acanthus mages bring their sense of calculated risk and thrill-loving exuberance to the Free Council, themselves a more freewheeling group than any of the Atlantean orders.

Within the Free Council, Acanthus mages can achieve high positions (should they want them) due to their innovative ideas and their willingness to take chances — and win. Their mastery of Time is no detriment either to their work with the Free Council. Often distrusted by the other orders, members of the Free Council find it becomes difficult for their opponents to lay traps for them due to that order's ability to elude the trap's trigger "just in time!"

Guardians of the Veil

The "secret police" and security force of the Atlantean mages find members of the Acanthus path useful within the order. Mages who specialize in luck, fate and calculating the odds — and who can sometimes tweak fate — serve these defenders of the Mysteries in many capacities. Though Acanthus mages sometimes tire of routines and rituals they find dull, they also bring an element of inventiveness to the procedures of the Guardians.

The Acanthus' affinity with all things Fae also places them in good stead with the Guardians, since Acanthus mages sometimes have access to sources of information unavailable to mages from other Paths. The strong independent streak in most Acanthus mages assures the Guardians that these Time and Fate mages will not be simply followers who never ask

questions and never challenge an order they believe to be wrong, yet the Guardians realize that Acanthus willworkers usually dislike unnecessary combat so that they will not unnecessarily provoke internal bickering for the sake of stirring the pot. On the other hand, Acanthus mages are willing to fight when goaded or when something important is at stake. Both Fate and Time are excellent assists in combat, and some Acanthus mages have even found their own equivalents to "elf shot."

Mysterium

The Mysterium actively looks for Acanthus mages to bolster the order's ranks, and the mages of the Thistle, in turn, gravitate toward this order if they are not snapped up by the Free Council first. The Mysterium's dedication to unearthing and securing as much magical lore and as many items as possible appeals to Acanthus mages on many levels. First, individuals on the Path of Acanthus enjoy testing their intelligence. Second, they don't mind tweaking the odds in their favor. Third, the glitter and shine of many magical items or the wealth of history and time contained in old scrolls and tomes draw Acanthus mages to the order. Acanthus mages' connection with Arcadia supplies the Mysterium with additional access to forgotten lore, particularly of the Fae races and their peculiar brands of magic. Steeped in either Celtic or Norse lore as many Acanthus mages are, they bring their own cache of knowledge to the order and have led to many discoveries through their expertise.

Silver Ladder

The Silver Ladder does not go out of its way to recruit members of the Path of the Thistle. This order is reluctant to enlist mages who have such a strong independent streak and who do not always approach matters in a logical fashion but rely on intuition and out-of-the-box thinking. On the other hand, power always appreciates luck and likes to know what the odds are before taking decisive actions. Therefore, the Silver Ladder tries to find Acanthus mages who can adapt to the rigors of order membership.

Devoted as the order is to the idea that all Awakened beings are a single "nation," the Silver Ladder cannot very well deny membership to Acanthus mages, though the order usually regards them with some distrust due to their reputation for chicanery and deception. Once the order realizes that Acanthus mages take oaths with great seriousness and that they, in fact, administer many oaths as a part of their mastery of the Fate Arcanum, many Silver Ladder mages rest easier at the thought of an Acanthus in their midst.

Sleepers

Mages of the Lunargent Thorn have dual feelings toward Sleepers. Unlike some orders that despise the unAwakened, Acanthus mages more often pity those people whose senses are blind to the magic that permeates the Fallen World. On the other hand, Acanthus mages take advantage of Sleepers as foils for their occasional con games, as audiences for their displays of magic tricks and illusions and as test subjects for their games of chance. Acanthus mages often go out of their way to prod Sleepers into Awakening and acquire Sleepwalkers whenever they can. For Acanthus mages, life is not truly lived unless one is wide Awake, and they would love to pass this gift along to as many Sleepers as possible. If not, the least Acanthus mages can do is entertain the Sleepers.

In fact, many Acanthus mages see Sleepers as their audiences, dupes, props, toys and, sometimes, victims. In fact, many mages of the Thistle show their link with the Fae through these mages' relationships with Sleepers. Both Seelie and Unseelie Fae saw mortals as creatures apart from and less than themselves. Both faerie courts dallied with mortals as lovers or playthings. The Seelie were wont to carry off humans who infatuated them and then, when they tired of their human lovers, the Seelie would simply desert them, often simply depositing them somewhere in the world with no clear memory of where they had been. The Unseelie, on the other hand, enjoyed more sinister games with mortals. As in the ballad of the human woman Isabel and her elf-knight lover, the Unseelie Fae often toyed with mortals, only to slay them afterwards without a modicum of guilt or regret.

Acanthus mages sometimes have similar attitudes toward Sleepers. Not that these mages deliberately set out to be cruel or feel superior, but their mindset simply rules out treating most Sleepers as equals. When an Acanthus mage takes a Sleeper as a lover, the mage is more likely to simply abandon her when he grows tired of someone whose mind is so closed off from the reality behind the real world. Of course, this is not always true, and many Acanthus mages are solicitous and loving to their mortal life partners.

The trickster streak in many Acanthus mages often leads them to play less than kind tricks on mortals. Acanthus con men or petty thieves have no sense of guilt for their actions toward Sleepers. Acanthus mages who prefer entertaining realize that their success as performers comes from pleasing a mostly-Sleeper audience.

Many Acanthus mages go out of their way to lend assistance to ailing or heartsick mortals. At the same time, these mages are just as likely to ignore the cries of a lost child or the confused look of the old woman in a crowded mall. How Acanthus mages feel about and treat Sleepers is a product of the conjoining of Fate and Time.

Character Creation

Mages of the Path of Acanthus exemplify the concept of hope first and foremost. Their affinity for Time and Fate links them with the ideas that time is on their side and that they

are, in fact, masters of their fate. What better reasons for hope! Their tendency toward the vice of Sloth also makes sense when examined in the light of the Path's ruling Arcana. Why work hard at something when you can tinker with time and when you can arrange the odds in your favor? You might as well just sit back and wait for the world to come to your door.

This section discusses various aspects of character creation, enabling players and Storytellers to design Acanthus mages that not only work well as fleshed-out personalities but also as mages from the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn.

Sample Concepts

In the description of the Enchanters, **Mage: The Awakening** lists several concepts appropriate for characters who walk the Path of the Thistle. Each of these character concepts illustrates some aspect of the Acanthus approach toward magic — and life.

Charlatan

Whether a carnival entertainer, a practiced con man or an Internet phisher, charlatans combine great personal charm (or a convincing Internet persona) with phenomenal good luck and superb timing to make people believe what the charlatans want them to believe. Charlatans deal in illusions, deceptions, trickery and chicanery. After their Awakening at the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn, charlatans retain their skill at and devotion to the arts of deception, but they adopt a new philosophy toward it. One of the lessons learned on the Path of the Thistle is that almost everything is subject to the vagaries of Fate and Time. Charlatans display the whimsicality of what most people consider "solid" reality. What's in your pocket one minute may no longer be there the next, and a story that moves you and convinces you to part with your money simply underscores the power of words. Most charlatan character types focus on Fate and on working the odds. The Free Council and the Guardians of the Veil both tend to recruit charlatans.

Karmic Enforcer

The connection between Acanthus mages and the Fate Arcanum provides the underpinning for this character concept. The karmic enforcer's primary purpose is to make certain that people get what they deserve or, in other words, to make certain that "what goes around, comes around." Administrators of justice (or just deserts), karmic enforcers fix the odds so that someone who has stolen an older person's life savings experiences a similar fate when he least expects it. At its most extreme, those who enforce the laws of karma can function as assassins, ending the life of a serial killer who has managed all these years to escape the fate he truly deserves. In addition to doling out karmic punishment, Acanthus karmic enforcers also make certain that good deeds get rewarded whenever possible. Many former police officers or even judges who have Awakened as Acanthus mages find their fulfillment in this concept. Many of these Acanthus mages find their way into the Adamantine Arrow as both enforcers and infiltrators.

Schizophrenic

Some individuals are so attuned to the passing of time and the many possibilities tied to the consequences of a single action that they fall into a sickness of the mind trying to take it all in. The withdrawal and apparent disassociation of these persons are the only possible responses to an overwhelming barrage of time convergences and alternate futures. Many minds break under the stress. Others simply Awaken and find the world of the Acanthus waiting for them.

Magic often enables schizophrenics to function in the Sleeping world. By empowering their control over Fate, these characters are able to narrow their fractured visions of the immediate future into fewer threads, which can be at least partially controlled. Altered time senses may be brought into sync with Sleeper time whenever necessary. Many Acanthus mages who have schizophrenic tendencies also learn the magic of the Mind to further their knowledge of their own thought processes.

Contemporary Bard

Acanthus Enchanters also often act as entertainers. Musicians, in particular, often Awaken at the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn. Legends speak of bards with enchanting voices. These composers and singers of songs knew the power of words and could praise or shame an individual through their lyrics. Today, many singers and other musicians — even stand-up comedians — exercise their satirical abilities to shame politicians and presidents, to declaim on social and domestic issues and to try to win the minds and hearts of their audiences, whether for animal rights or an end to human trafficking. When an individual who sees herself as a modern-day bard Awakens as an Acanthus, she recognizes the value of her power to craft binding oaths. Although not an impossibility by any means, Acanthus "bards" are less likely to be nationally famous performers than they are to be wedding singers and other local entertainers. These individuals are coveted by both the Silver Ladder and the Mysterium.

Gypsy Prophet

The fascination with the occult, and in particular, the wealth of symbolism present in Tarot cards, has drawn many people to dabble in fortune-telling by means of cards, tea leaves and other processes. Identification with this occupation or pastime with the gypsies has led to the growth of a subculture of modern day "gypsies." While few of these individuals are, in fact, descended from the Romany gypsies, these prophets nevertheless attempt

to live the life of the gypsy — that of the nomadic prophet and fiery entertainer. Many of these "gypsy prophets" Awaken, giving them greater insights into their favorite fortune-telling device. All of a sudden, the prophecies take on a keener degree of accuracy.

Gypsy prophets not only learn some Mind magic along with Acanthus' ruling Arcana, but they may also study Space, since the future is a combination of Time moving through Space. Either the Mysterium or the Free Council welcomes these Acanthus mages to their fellowship.

Lucky Ne'er-Do-Well

Some people seem to have all the luck with no effort at all. Call them rakes, wastrels, lazy good-fer-nothings — they get by on looks and charm, winning friends and laying their hands on any resource they need without appearing to lift a finger. These lucky bastards, if they Awaken, almost always come to the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn and leave as Acanthus mages. These characters manifest the most visible traits of the Fool card in the Tarot: always ready to step over a cliff, never seeming to pay attention, but always either pulling back just before tumbling over or else stepping softly over the precipice to land on her feet.

The ne'er-do-well has learned to play the odds and how to stack them without getting caught. This character type also seems to benefit from perfect timing and never has to worry about punctuality. The Free Council likes to have these mages in the order's company, but lately the Guardians of the Veil have begun moving into this territory.

STORM KEEPER

When the first humans gathered into communities formed by blood or conquest, they did so for many reasons: to defend their territory and their families, to ensure a continuing food supply through hunting, gathering and, later, farming and to stand together against the great mysteries they could not explain — the terrors of a sun that abandoned them every day for the dark violence of night, the fury of storms and the sudden finality of a lightning strike that could split trees or strike people dead, the long, parched seasons when no water gave succor to the land and when animals and people died from slow starvation or quicker thirst or the rushing floodwaters that drenched lands where drought had packed the bare earth too hard to absorb the water. Somehow, facing the terrors of the elements was eased by the nearness of others.

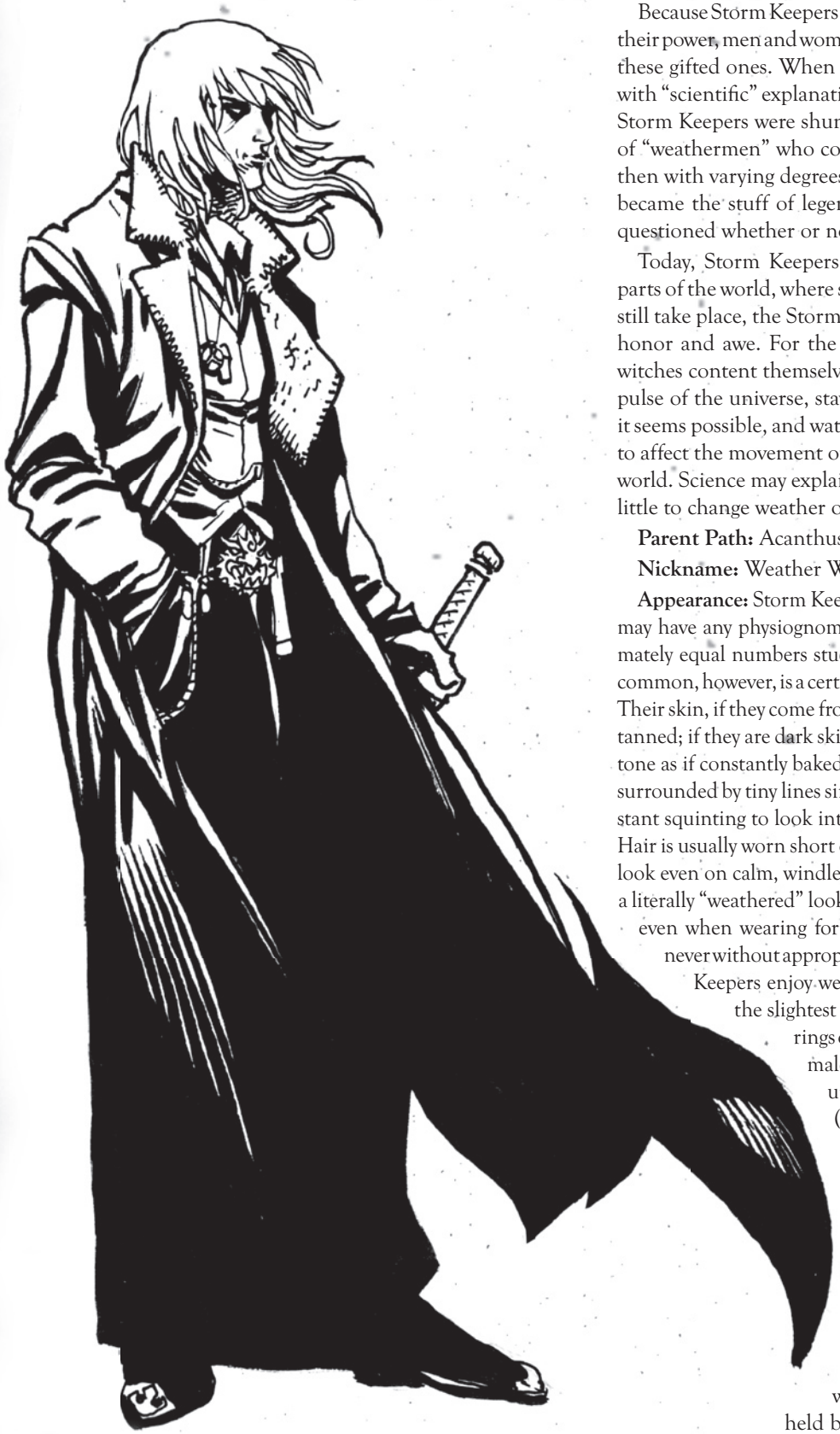
Imagine the sense of awe that filled the hearts of these early people when wise men and women arose who could command the lightning and still the thunder, who could bring gentle rains to parched lands and turn aside the flood waters, who could stop wildfires in their tracks and cause the killing blizzards to cease. These men and women, whether they were born into the tribes or came from distant lands — as the earliest ones claimed — held the lives of entire tribes in their hands. Because of these wise ones' powers, they were both honored and feared; they were called weather witches, wise men or women, rain dancers or many other names. They called themselves Storm Keepers, for they learned to master the storms within themselves as well as the storms that came from the play of elements within and around the earth.

Now the tribes felt that they were not entirely at the mercy of storms, floods, wildfires and other natural upheavals. Their Storm Keepers could not always assuage the powers that sent these elemental visitations, but the Storm Keepers could intercede and, sometimes, they could change a raging storm into a gentle rain or an all-consuming wildfire into a beneficial burn that purged part of the land and allowed new growth to rise in place of the old. This worker of weather magic stood between them and the unknown, between the tribe and the wrath of the gods.

The Storm Keeper is more than a bringer of rain or an ender of floods. She is more than a predictor of weather. In essence, she has made herself one with the pulse of the world so that she understands on a deep, molecular level the processes and the give-and-take that cause the phenomenon of weather. She knows when stopping a storm will truly save a village from floods or when it will only deflect the waters so that they cause greater damage elsewhere. She understands the balance of nature and the destiny of those who live in the natural world.

Storm Keepers gradually shared their weather lore with individuals who seemed able to understand it. They became great teachers of balance and interrelatedness. In the old world, they were sometimes thought of as druids. In the Americas, they were called rain dancers, for their intricate tracing of patterns and calls to the Heavens often resulted in an answer from the formerly empty skies. They used their knowledge of how fate and time affected the forces of nature to analyze when it was best to tamper with the movement of wind and water and when doing so would only bring disaster later.

The heart of the storm beats within my breast. The flood waters are my tears.



Because Storm Keepers sometimes withheld their power, men and women sometimes resented these gifted ones. When other people came along with "scientific" explanations of weather patterns, the Storm Keepers were shunted to the sidelines in favor of "weathermen" who could only predict the weather (and then with varying degrees of accuracy). Soon, Storm Keepers became the stuff of legend. Modern men and women even questioned whether or not Storm Keepers truly existed.

Today, Storm Keepers remain on the sidelines. In some parts of the world, where shamanic rituals and weather calling still take place, the Storm Keeper enjoys a remnant of the old honor and awe. For the most part, however, these weather witches content themselves with keeping their fingers on the pulse of the universe, staving off the worst of disasters when it seems possible, and watching the futility of mere knowledge to affect the movement of air and water across the face of the world. Science may explain weather, but so far science can do little to change weather or control it.

Parent Path: Acanthus

Nickname: Weather Witch

Appearance: Storm Keepers come from all ethnic groups and may have any physiognomy. Both men and women in approximately equal numbers study this Legacy. What they all have in common, however, is a certain quality about their physical bodies. Their skin, if they come from a light-colored race, is permanently tanned; if they are dark skinned, their skin develops a deep, rich tone as if constantly baked by the sun. Their eyes are frequently surrounded by tiny lines similar to laugh lines but caused by constant squinting to look into the sun or to fight snow blindness. Hair is usually worn short or else it retains a tousled, windblown look even on calm, windless days. In short, Storm Keepers have a literally "weathered" look. They tend to dress for the outdoors, even when wearing formal or "dress" clothes, and they are never without appropriate weather gear. Many female Storm Keepers enjoy wearing jewelry that is sensitive to even the slightest of breezes, such as long, dangling earrings or feathery hairpieces. Shaven heads in males and, occasionally, in females are not uncommon, as a convenience measure (no need to untangle windblown locks or wait for soaked hair to dry).

Background: Storm Keepers in the modern world often emerge from the scientific or academic communities or else from some of the remaining tribal-based peoples. Thus, many of them are either middle to upper class in family background or else they occupy whatever social and economic niche held by their tribes. They may come from

My anger is the wildfire, and my passion the lightning strike.

Indo-European stock, Latino, African (and African American), Native American, Aboriginal or almost any other group. Most Storm Keepers exhibit a love of nature that focuses on natural phenomena rather than on animals or plants. Almost all of them are risk-takers by nature, willing to put their lives and reputations on the line by making predictions about weather patterns. Many of them are college-educated, while others are self-taught or come from a tradition that teaches them the necessary knowledge and skills to prepare them for this Legacy.

Organization: Storm Keepers do not have a formal organization. They are so few in number that if they did not willingly disperse around the world, they would be forced to do so by the demands of nature. This makes it difficult for more than two or, sometimes, three Storm Keepers to get together at any one time. Some Storm Keepers still assign themselves to the remaining tribal people in the world, usually in places such as the Amazon, or the Congo, or the Australian outback or the Alaskan wilderness. Whenever meetings of tribes or clans within tribes take place, Storm Keepers seek out their counterparts to share information and compare notes on weather patterns and elemental stirrings of the earth and sky. In a more urban society, Storm Keepers may meet at meteorologist conferences, global warming symposia or similar meetings. Here, under the camouflage of "science," Storm Keepers can discuss their recent findings and exchange data. The Internet also allows the Weather Witches to maintain some sort of global contact. During hurricane, monsoon or wildfire seasons, some Storm Keepers remain in touch with each other in the event of emergency interventions.

Storm Keepers learn from teachers and mentors. During their times of study, student and teacher usually stay in close contact with, if not in proximity to, each other. This is the only time in which a steady bond between two Storm Keepers is maintained — outside of mutual bonds formed through life-partnering, marriage or other family ties.

Suggested Oblations: Weather-watching (maintaining a survey of changing weather over the course of a day, a week or a month); predicting the weather (a practice which must be done in front of witnesses who need not be aware of the magical purpose of the prediction); experiencing extreme weather conditions (such as walking in a blizzard or driving through heavy rains); participating in a ceremonial rain dance as part of a tribal cultural meet; chanting or making offerings to ancient weather gods

Concepts: Meteorologists (includes professors of meteorology), TV weather forecaster, urban shaman, tornado chasers, extreme sports enthusiast, climatologist, environmental activist, survivalist, back-to-the-earth proponent

Attainments

Mages who learn the Storm Keeper Legacy should focus their studies on the Forces Arcanum as well as the Fate Arcanum, thus giving them the basis for familiarity with both the elemental energies of the world and the means of predicting the future. Since this is a Legacy taught to Acanthus mages, the Time Arcanum can also prove useful. Knowledge of an appropriate science (such as meteorology, climatology or environmental studies) is also helpful, though not necessary and may be learned either academically or through self-study.

Acanthus who learn the first Attainment of this Legacy can afterwards treat the Forces Arcanum as a ruling Arcanum.

1st: Shading the Pattern

Prerequisite: Gnosis 3, Forces 2 (primary), Fate 2

The mage uses his abilities to influence and control elemental forces along with his ability to guide probability in his favor to alter existing weather patterns into something more or less severe than its original form. By means of this Attainment, the Storm Keeper may lessen the force of an approaching storm or make slight changes in its path. He may also do the same for weather events such as wildfires caused by lightning strikes, tornados and flash floods. The changes must be within the limitations set out by the various "Influence" and "Control" spells of Forces 1 and 2. This requires an instant action and an Intelligence + Science (or an equivalent Knowledge) + Forces roll.

Optional Arcanum: Time 2

By using Time 2, the mage can gain information about the consequences of shifting the course of a storm or moving the path of a tornado in terms of what may happen to the affected areas if the desired change occurs. This uses the same principles of Time 1 "Momentary Flux" and Time 2 "Augury."

2nd: Direct Storms

Prerequisite: Gnosis 5, Forces 3

The mage is able to exert even more control over emerging weather patterns, making broad changes in their direction and force. Though she cannot yet create weather where nothing exists, she can reach for nearby storms and bring them to her or send them away. She can, however, use an existing storm to summon down lightning, similar to the Forces 3 "Call Lightning" spell. Unlike with normal casting of the spell, this Attainment allows the mage to perform multiple castings without fear of Improbability.

Some of the changes that can occur through the use of this Attainment include stepping the intensity of a storm up or down. This is an instant action and no roll is required to alter the storm's effect one degree in either direction, although for this the mage must be within sensory range of the storm (even if it's on the edge or within sight of it on the distant horizon). To go beyond that, an Intelligence + Science + Forces roll is required, with each success allowing an additional degree of latitude for the mage. For example, a mage wishes to lessen the severity of a Category 3 hurricane. No roll is required

to take the hurricane from Category 3 to Category 2. If the mage wishes to downsize the storm further, the above roll is mandatory. One success allows the mage to lower the storm to a Category 1. Two successes means that the hurricane becomes a tropical storm. Three successes makes it a tropical depression, and four successes diminishes the storm altogether or leaves merely a gentle rain. A similar progression applies to tornados and any other severe weather phenomenon that can be measured in "steps" or "levels" of intensity.

Optional Arcanum: Time 3

A mage who has Time 3 can also shift the timing for the storm, causing it to arrive or leave an area earlier or later than it would otherwise hit. A roll of Wits + Science + Time may be called for by the Storyteller if timing is significant. Only one success is required to hasten or slow the storm to the desired degree. Possible uses of this option include slowing down a storm long enough for residents of a town to take cover or hastening a storm so that its duration is spent before dark. This also allows a mage to move a lightning strike (using the "Call Lightning" ability, above) forward in time by as much as 10 minutes to enable individuals to move outside the strike zone (or, perversely, into it).

3rd: Weather Making

Prerequisite: Gnosis 7, Forces 4

At this level of Attainment, the mage enjoys a vast amount of power over elemental forces and cannot only exercise fine control over storms and other weather phenomena, but can also transform one type of weather into another. Only a single success is necessary on an instant Intelligence + Science + Forces roll to enable the mage to achieve his desired effect. While the mage cannot create tornados and hurricanes from clear skies, he can conjure up storms from nothing and dissipate them entirely (see the Forces 4 "Change Weather" spell). At this stage, the mage can end droughts, stop floods, bring on or dissipate snow storms and put out wildfires by creating a deluge over the blaze. In addition, the mage can change the weather from one form to another, transforming a firestorm into harmless heat lightning or vice versa using the Forces 4 "Transform Energy" spell as a model.

While most Storm Keepers use their powers to benefit communities or areas, a few deal punitive damage to whole groups of people who displease them.

Optional Arcanum: Time 4

A mage with Time 4 can effect a delay to weather by a number of hours equal to the number of successes on an instant Wits + Science + Time roll. He can also gain advice (similar to the Time 4 "Prophecy" spell) on how severe alterations will affect the future. Thus he can tell if creating an artificial rainy season to end a drought will result in a catastrophic erosion of valuable topsoil in another area in the near future due to a lack of rain.

Acanthus Characters

Close-Up Magician

Quote: *Make certain that dollar bill is in that sealed envelope. Are you sure? Look again!*

Background: Her family has carried on a tradition of magic as entertainment for several generations. Her grandfather was the treasurer of the local Society of Magicians in the 1920s, and she has had the privilege of meeting some of the grand performers. Her father, a traditionalist as far as stage magic was concerned, had a hard time seeing her as anything other than a magician's assistant. Only his lack of sons and her insistent pleading caused him to break down and teach her the tricks of the trade. Her small hands and quick, fluid movements made close-up magic, worked at tables in restaurants or in front of small, intimate audiences, a natural for her to pursue.

On the night her father died, she cried herself to sleep, realizing how much he had wanted a son and how many prejudices he had to overcome to teach her. She felt bereft of her mentor and fell asleep with the thought of seeking him in her dreams. Instead, she fell into a deep sleep that took her to a Watchtower that was surrounded by thorny bushes that shone luminescent in the silvery moonlight.

Description: Now in her late 20s, she has lost none of her youthful grace. Her face is marked by profound sorrow at the loss of her father, but she hides the fact that she is still in mourning by an overly cheerful demeanor, even when she is not performing. She has steady gigs at local restaurants and private parties, and spends time in the company of other stage magicians. This gives her a good sense of what's going on in the world of "overt" magic.

Her nimbus appears as a swirling fog of colored smoke around her knees.

Storytelling Hints: Always ready to pull out a trick at a moment's notice, she sometimes uses her stage magic to illustrate her latest bit of news. She is quick to laugh and her hands are almost always in motion, providing constant distractions even when she is working no magic. She always seems to be in the right place at the right time, and her luck is phenomenal.

Abilities:

Pick Pockets (dice pool 8) — For a price and a very good reason, she will remove certain items from a targeted person's wallet, pocket or purse or place something among a person's possessions. She sometimes enjoys feeling that she is part of an important conspiracy, and — guess what? — she is!

Occult (dice pool 6) — She is a good source of information on obscure sects, cults and magical movements, particularly if they involve magical performances. For example, she knows quite a bit about snake charmers in India.

Storm Chaser

Quote: *I was getting great footage of the tornado until I noticed that the sucker was coming straight for me and my truck!*

Background: All his life, he's been fascinated with and terrified by catastrophes: tornados, hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanoes — you name it, he obsessed on it. When he was 10, he was struck by lightning and miraculously came through without as much as a mark even though the tree he was standing under was destroyed and a neighbor who had taken shelter under the same tree was killed instantly. From that time forward, he knew he was living on borrowed time, so he set out to see how far he could push Fate before it pushed back. The second time lightning struck him, he was 16. The jolt threw him into a brief coma, not long enough to require extensive hospitalization, but long enough for him to take a short jaunt to the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn. After he got his driver's license, his interest in storm chasing sprang forth full grown.

Description: In his late 40s, he remains a child at heart, always ready to jump in his pickup truck, turn on his fancy monitoring equipment and chase down the latest big weather formation. He's driven through a hurricane and moved along inside its eye, been flipped in his truck by a tornado and photographed a major lightning storm in central Florida while bolts were coming down all around him. If he hasn't seen it all, he's seen a lot of it, but his face still lights up whenever anyone starts talking about big storms or he sees the sky get dark and cloudy.

His nimbus manifests as the crack and peel of thunder, echoing off across an unseen plain as the casting ends.

Storytelling Hints: His knowledge of emergency driving techniques makes him an excellent person to have behind the wheel in a high speed chase, although self-preservation instinct (or lack thereof) may prove counter-indicative. He knows how to protect himself (and other people) in almost any kind of natural disaster or rough weather, and he's always good for news of the latest weather forecasts for miles around.

Abilities:

Stunt Driving (dice pool 8) — He can stop on a dime and give you nine cents in change. That's how good he is. He'll be only too happy to take you somewhere you need to go, especially if there's bad weather involved. He's also not averse to trading favors — a quick trip across the desert in return for your assistance in tracking down that F4 tornado that's in the next county.

Investigation (dice pool 7) — He often needs to find out information that's not available to the general public, and he's quite good at uncovering what he needs. Luck is certainly with him in many ways.

Bianca

Quote: *Welcome to the Lady Grande Casino and Hotel! May you have an enjoyable stay, and may your fate and good fortune walk hand in hand during your stay!*

Background: Maria Skyhawk DelGado was born on a Hopi Indian reservation in New Mexico, the daughter of a tribal wise woman and a Mexican gambler who preferred the Hopi way of life to either life in Mexico or in mainstream America. From her mother Talasi, Maria learned the sacred ways of Hopi women and useful skills such as pottery, beadwork, weaving and herbal healing. Maria's father Roderigo taught her his only skill — the way of the gambler. She learned numerous variants of poker, blackjack, solitaire and other betting card games as well as dice and roulette.

Although she was a good student in the reservation school, she was constantly in trouble for gambling during recess, and, more often than not, her classmates owed her their lunch money and allowances. Her mother scolded her; her father just smiled and remarked that some things were just inherited.

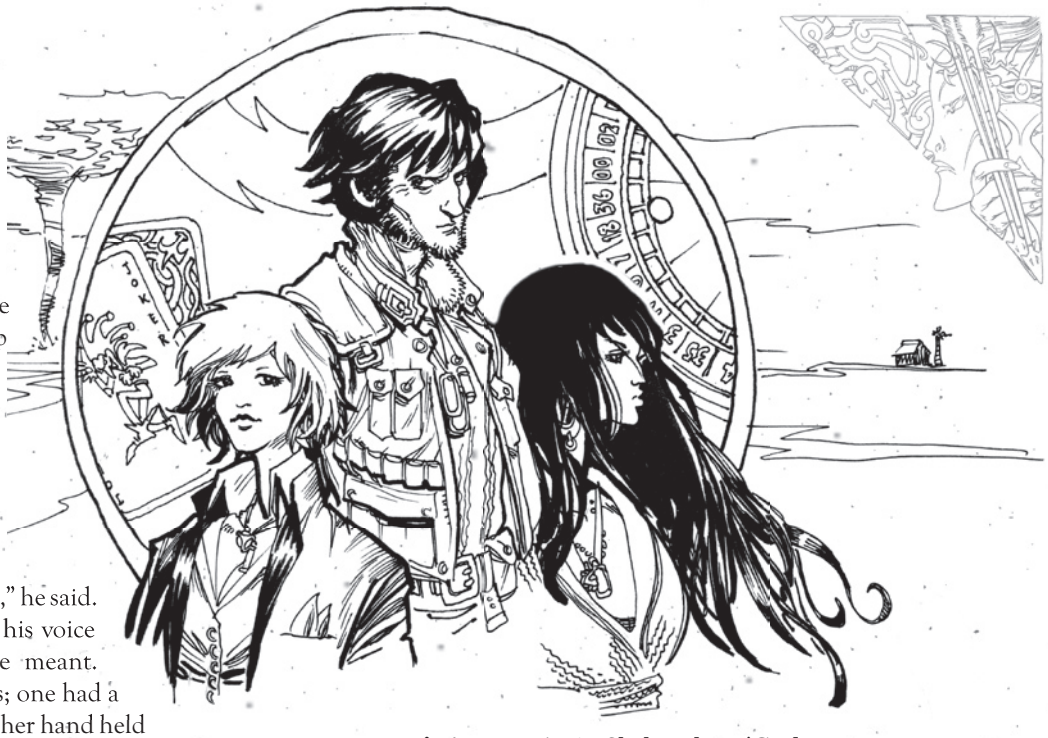
After high school, Maria left the reservation to attend the University of New Mexico on an academic scholarship. She wanted to major in Indian Studies and eventually teach classes at the reservation on Hopi cultural identity. She found out, however, that many of the old prejudices still existed, and some of her classmates snubbed her because of her Native American origins and her preference for traditional ways.

In order to gain the friendship, or at least the tolerance, of her classmates, Maria began nighttime gambling games in one of the meeting rooms in the student recreation center. Soon, she found herself a popular woman on campus. Even the security guards turned a blind eye to the late nights; in fact, some of them would stop by for "just a few hands" during their rounds.

Maria never considered that she might be making enemies outside the university. When word of her weekly "student casinos" found its way to the leader of organized gambling in town, Maria soon received a visitor and a gentle (verbal only) warning. Still not understanding her peril, Maria thanked her visitor for his advice and said she would take it under consideration. She did and decided to continue as she had been. That was her mistake.

One night, on the way back to her dorm from a study session, she was accosted by two men in dark suits. The next thing she knew, one was holding her arms behind her while the other was pummeling her in the stomach and chest until she felt her legs give way. The man who held her let her fall to the ground. Then the kicking began. Just before she passed out, Maria cursed both her attackers. Then darkness claimed her.

She awoke on a path strewn with thistles that led to a silvery tower wrapped around with thorns and roses. From her Hopi background, she recognized a vision quest when it hit



her in the face. She followed the path to the tower, took a thorn from the wall and walked inside. There she found a wall inscribed with names, all seemingly written in blood. Certain of what she should do, Maria drove the tip of the thorn into the fleshy part of her thumb and inscribed her name in blood on the wall.

She awoke again, this time in a hospital. A doctor was standing over her, smiling kindly. "I see you've Awakened," he said. Maria heard the capital A in his voice and suddenly knew what he meant. She looked down at her hands; one had a bandage on the thumb. Her other hand held a thorny stem that ended in a single, perfect white rose.

"My name is Bianca," she said, and began her studies as a mage of the Path of Acanthus.

Bianca left college and moved with her teacher, a member of the Free Council, to Las Vegas where he opened up a private practice. She quickly got work in one of the casinos and eventually became head hostess at the prestigious Lady Grande Casino and Hotel. Here she dispenses luck (or withholds it) and waits for the day when two men she will recognize instantly walk through the casino door.

Description: Bianca is a strikingly attractive woman with Hopi and Mexican blood. Her long, black hair has a slight wave to it, while her dark olive complexion and dark, long-lashed eyes give her a sultry look. Her Indian blood shows in her high cheekbones and broad, generous mouth. She wears designer clothes for her job at the casino but prefers jeans and work shirts or long skirts and embroidered blouses for casual attire.

Her nimbus is heard as the sound of a roulette wheel spinning down.

Storytelling Hints: Since her Awakening, Bianca has become a firm believer in the power of Fate and has made every effort to study it in all its forms. She finds casinos as the perfect expression of the working of Fate. She is confident that the mob goons who attacked her a few years ago will find themselves drawn by her curse to the casino, and then she will exact her revenge and visit their Fate upon them. After that, she has no plans, but trusts to Time and Fate that she will know her path in the proper time. She raises herbs in the back of the house that she shares with her mentor (now her fiancé) and is active in a local craft group and a wisdom-sharing circle.

Dedicated Magical Tools: Turquoise pendant

Real Name: Maria Skyhawk DelGado
Path: Acanthus
Order: Free Council
Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 2, Resolve 2
Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2
Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 2
Mental Skills: Academics 2, Crafts* (Hopi Pottery) 2, Computer 1, Investigation 1, Medicine (Herbal First Aid) 1
Physical Skills: Athletics (Fending Off Advances) 1, Brawl 1, Drive 2,
Social Skills: Empathy 2, Intimidation 2, Persuasion* (Smoothing Ruffled Feathers) 2, Socialize 2, Streetwise (Card Games) 3
Merits: High Speech, Resources 2, Sanctum (Shared) 3
Willpower: 4
Wisdom: 7
Virtue: Hope
Vice: Sloth
Initiative: 4
Defense: 2
Speed: 9
Health: 7
Gnosis: 2
Arcana: Fate 2, Life 1, Prime 1, Time 2
Rotes: *Fate* — Winds of Chance (•), Fortune's Protection (••); *Life* — Cleanse the Body (•); *Prime* — Supernal Vision (•); *Time* — Momentary Flux (•), Augury (••)
Mana/per turn: 11/2
Armor: 2 ("Fortune's Protection," Fate ••)



MASTIGOS
Path of Scourging

You are alone, in absolute darkness. No clothing, no tools. Only the contents of your mind. A body? Check — command your hands to move, to grasp your limbs, to examine yourself, to making sure everything's here. Head, arms, shoulders, trunk, legs. Feet.

Ground.

So you are occupying a location in space. A base from which to start — and the possibility of directions to move in.

At the thought of direction, a pulse of light off to one side. Turn. Was this the way? Take a step. Plant sole, shift weight. And again — a distant flicker of firelight just beyond some remote bend, hint of thronging shadows, brief murmur from a crowd of voices. A second tentative step, and a third.

Again the flicker, slightly larger, closer, voices more distinct — but something blocks your view. Size and shape of your head. At eye level. Arm's length away.

Call out. A deep hiss answers.

Reach out. Fingers meet thick hair, high brow. Below, eyes, like a human's, blink of lashes against fingertips, cheeks swelling to grin. Teeth perfect, even, but the smile too wide, row of teeth curving back beneath earlobe. And beyond, hair thickens into mane over heavy beast shoulders, ribs and spine under coarse fur, ripple of swift predatory muscle. Past steel-spring haunches the tail, cool, smooth scales twisting in serpentine coils. Just as the tip whips from your grasp, a porcupine bristle of quills, a sting in your palm. Then it is gone.

But it left you something. A barb stuck in your hand. Pluck it out quickly. But don't throw it away, for it is power.

Ahead, shadows dance and riot; the cacophony mounts louder. Amid wails, shrieks, groans and shouts, you make out your name. There, again. And again.

Press on. Your time has come.

The Devil is a name for a body politic, in which there are very different orders and degrees of spirits, and perhaps in as much variety of place and state, as among ourselves.

— Joseph Glanvil, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, 1689

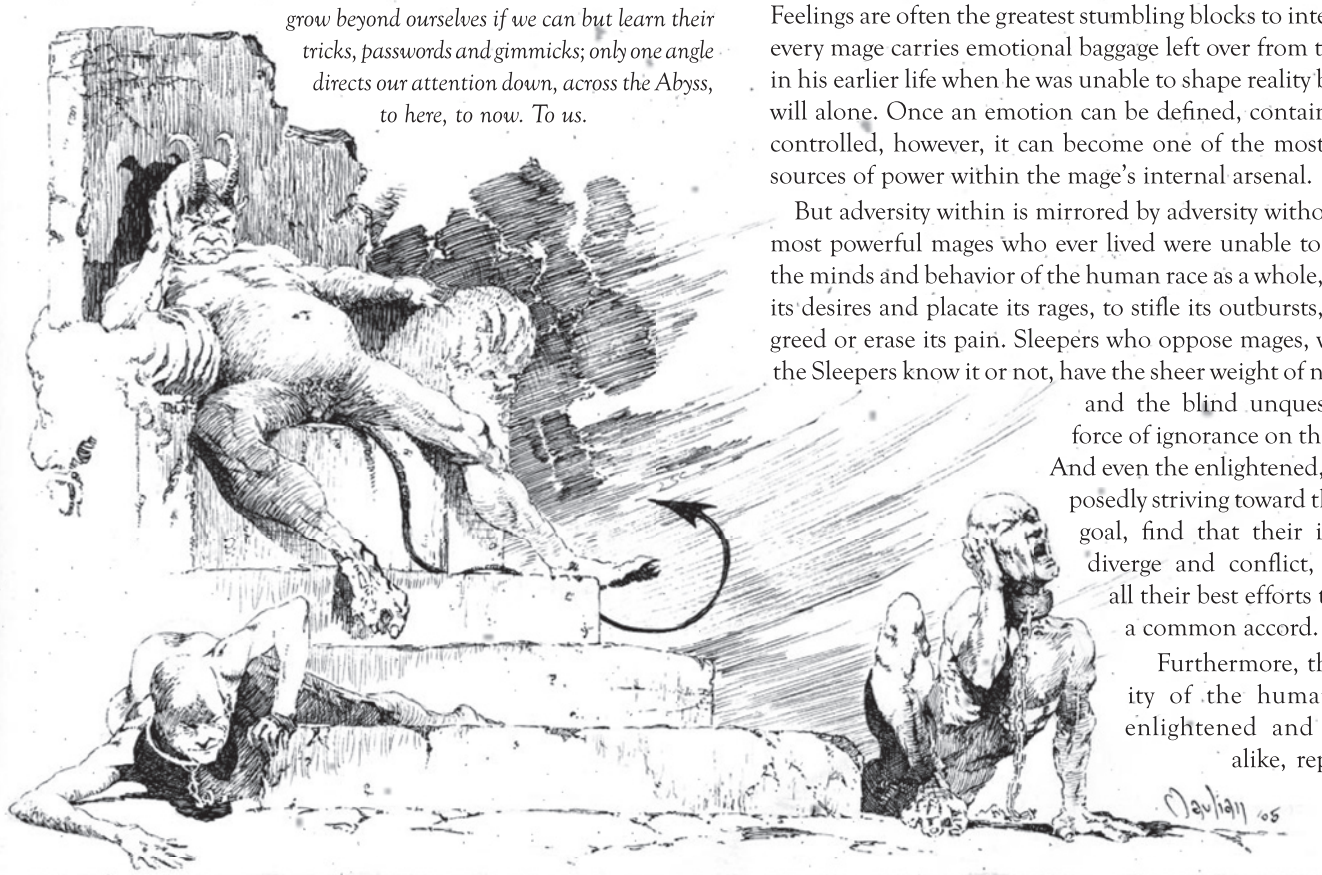
Introduction

This chapter details the Warlocks of Path Mastigos, who draw their magical power from the Realm of Pandemonium through the Watchtower of the Iron Gauntlet.

Theme: Triumph Over Adversity

Behold the Devil. On His throne He sits, bestial yet knowing, repugnant yet seductive, horned and horny, the outcast become conqueror. Below, chained to His throne's pedestal, are the polarities of creation, yin and yang yanked from the Tao, their connective tissue severed, each contained and confined, each being no more than what they are. The divine twins, male and female, God and Goddess, whose sacred incest begets the degenerate offspring called humankind, now yoked to serve a greater power. Whence this power, this mastery, this dominion?

Upon His brow, the stamp of the Supernal, the pentangular compass pointing toward the Five True Worlds. Four of its acute angles point upward and outward, to Realms not our own, inviting us to grow beyond ourselves if we can but learn their tricks, passwords and gimmicks; only one angle directs our attention down, across the Abyss, to here, to now. To us.



Mastigos — the Path of Scourging — is the way of releasing the will, and of exultation in its unfettered supremacy. Those whose names are gouged into the Watchtower of the Iron Gauntlet delight in the exercise of power, and free themselves to indulge in this delight.

But real mastery of the external world may only be achieved through mastery of the internal, through self-examination and self-operation. Desire must be controlled and fear must be confronted. One must test one's limits, learn by hard experience one's strengths and weaknesses, and then transform weakness into strength. That strength can then be used to test the limits of reality.

The theme of this chapter is Triumph Over Adversity. Just as a muscle must push against some resistance in order to build itself up, so too must the mage's will be pitted against obstacles in order to strengthen itself. The world is full of hindrances to will, and every intention is opposed on all sides by the intentions of others — human or otherwise. Thoughts must be proven against demonstrable facts to have any utilitarian value. Feelings are often the greatest stumbling blocks to intent, and every mage carries emotional baggage left over from the time in his earlier life when he was unable to shape reality by act of will alone. Once an emotion can be defined, contained and controlled, however, it can become one of the most potent sources of power within the mage's internal arsenal.

But adversity within is mirrored by adversity without. The most powerful mages who ever lived were unable to change the minds and behavior of the human race as a whole, to curb its desires and placate its rages, to stifle its outbursts, glut its greed or erase its pain. Sleepers who oppose mages, whether the Sleepers know it or not, have the sheer weight of numbers and the blind unquestioning force of ignorance on their side. And even the enlightened, all supposedly striving toward the same goal, find that their interests diverge and conflict, despite all their best efforts to reach a common accord.

Furthermore, the totality of the human race, enlightened and Asleep alike, represents

but a small fraction of the visible world, creatures of finite awareness and capabilities occupying only a portion of the surface of a ball of rock whirling through a universe whose furthest reaches have yet to be discerned. Any who would take action of consequence in that vast universe must reckon with its overwhelming, ubiquitous inertia, its inconceivable mass and unimaginable age, its brooding, faceless intelligence. And for the Awakened, this visible universe is but a single degraded subsection of an even greater whole, larger, older, more active and diverse with teeming hordes of restless intelligences both blunt and refined, playing out seething dramas in uncharted realms beyond counting. Given such vast opposition, it is a wonder that any mortal can hope to act at all.

That wonder is claimed by the Mastigos as their province. They dare to pit themselves against this infinite array of adversity, and gamble their own souls upon success.

Mood: Antagonism

The Scourge teaches that, before Its pommel can be grasped, Its lash must be tasted, that pain must be known in order for pleasure to be known, that to suffer is to learn. The threat of extinction drives evolution. Kill or be killed. Eat or be eaten. Get them before they get you.

The mood of this chapter is antagonistic. The Mastigos not only thrive on adversity but are willing to play the adversary for others, even to be a negative example, a landmark others can use to steer away from the course of madness. It is not for the weak to ply the Path of Scourging; the Kingdom of Nightmares is no place for the suggestible one who has not hardened her Self against fear and insanity, and the sympathetic trusting soul that finds itself amidst the Abode of Demons will quickly be rent apart and consumed.

This is not to say that all Warlocks are simply contrary and pugnacious. They do not automatically contradict those around them or take every opportunity to pick a fight without reason. To oppose without purpose, without necessity, without aiming toward a desirable end, is to be possessed by the very insanity and ignorance that is any mage's ultimate Adversary. The Mastigos is a catalyst, an *agent provocateur* who prods others into action and averts them from the wrong direction. He has no need to be loved or even liked, for he is willing to be the scapegoat, the repository of petty fears and hatreds that would otherwise dissipate the energies of his compatriots.

Thinking of deliberate antagonism solely in terms of open conflict is not necessary either, for the Warlock must be subtle as well. Obstacles that cannot be destroyed or dispelled by main force may yet be overcome by other means. In fact, one of the great secrets of this Path is that desire has proven to be an even greater motivator than hatred, and that the best way to get anybody to do anything — especially to do it well — is to make them *want* to do it. Mastigos pride themselves most on their subtlety and deviousness, and naturally take special pleasure in the role of seducer, the giver of pleasure. This, of course, does little to improve their reputation with the other Paths.

History

Given the Warlocks' propensity for opposition and adversarial stances, the history and legendry of the Mastigos is full of both internal contradictions and wide variances with the shared lore of other Paths. The modern Warlock must at some point come to terms with a past that is full of feuds and rivalries, and a body of lore laced with ancient slanders.

Mythic Tales

In Africa, humanity's oldest tongues name her Ishbalwah, a tall woman with smoking hair who brings drought and plague. Taoism's most ancient oral traditions speak of Yai Shu, Dragon Queen of the Three Rivers. The neolithic Celts knew her as Yshvaugh, a wildly destructive princess of the Fomoire. Cuneiform inscriptions on ceremonial knives from the ancient Near East describe Yishuva, midwife to Lilith and wet nurse to the Queen of Night's demonic brood, while the very same syllables rendered in Sanskrit are given as the name of a daughter of Kali. And to this day in Morocco men still cringe at strange shrieks in the night said to come from Aisha Qandisha, castrating avenger of violated women. Those steeped in the lore of Atlantis (or who read esoteric interpretations into the work of H. Rider Haggard) call her Queen Ayeshau — "She Whom You Must Obey."

To those who follow other Paths, she is merely one of the Five Widows of the Fall, along with Devau, Daanau, Layalau and Llanau, separated from their kings when the Celestial Ladder crumbled. Stranded in this Fallen World while her mate struggles in the Realms Supernal far beyond the great Abyss, Ayeshau is remembered in Obrimos myth as a humbled, broken tyrant and in Moros lore as stricken mad with grief. Other Paths, however, characterize her as a callous "merry widow" whose wanton lusts and cruelty only increased after the Fall.

Mastigos lore itself does little to dispel this unflattering portrait; variant versions of Path foundation stories seem to collectively depict a voracious polygamist who lost any number of royal husbands up the Celestial Ladder, not to mention numerous suitors, admirers, paramours and idle dalliances along with innumerable love-slaves, love-children and plain old bastards. The Watchtower of the Iron Gauntlet was thus erected, the stories aver, as a supremely phallic monument to a desire urgent enough to span worlds. When all are tallied, there so many candidates for the title of erector of the Watchtower that the truly erudite Mastigos is distinguished by a kind of sophisticated indifference regarding their Oracle's original identity.



Some of Ayeshau's words survive in such ancient texts as the *Lao Wu Ming Ching* ("Ancient Nameless Classic") and the pre–Vedic *Midnight Sutra*. Her most famous epigram reads "If you cannot serve yourself, then surely you shall be made to serve another. If you cannot master yourself, then another shall certainly master you."

The Manyu–Mazda Feud

Before recorded history, trouble and turmoil already began to surround those who followed the Path of Scourging. On the plains of southern Central Asia, two magely houses vied for supremacy among the peoples that would be known to later ages as Indo Aryan: the Manyu who followed the teachings of Ayeshau, and the Mazda, Obrimos mages that the Mastigos claim follow a line of spiritual descent from the Atlantean Widow they call Devau. (This story is told from the Mastigos point of view, of course, and so the Obrimos version of this conflict — if one even exists — may be entirely different.)

As was the way of many mages in this archaic time, each house claimed superiority over the other, and neither one would bow down or concede in any way to their rivals. Each house regarded themselves as good, just and true, while the other was said to be evil, corrupt and false. Such views may be but the degraded echoes of what would now be seen as a propaganda campaign between two complementary philosophies. In that age, however, no such conciliation between rivals was even considered a possibility. Not only were the egos of mages involved, but whole tribes of Sleepers took sides in the conflict and exhorted the participants to deepen the rift with their praises and vituperations.

Competition between Mazda and Manyu escalated into open warfare involving both Awakened and Sleepers. Outlying tribes were drawn into the bloodshed, and unrelated populations were enslaved to serve as arrow-fodder. Bitterness spread beyond the original rivalry, embroiling many who had no connection with the Manyu or the Mazda. The Atlantean orders were unable to contain or quell the strife, as oath-mates were caught up in the quarreling and turned on each other. Even mages from other Paths became implicated in rabid misrepresentations of the Supernal schema; their beloved faeries, totems and ancestral shades were demonized, denounced as denizens of the Kingdom of Nightmares, or else subsumed into a rigid hierarchy of celestial intelligences. (At least, this is how the Mastigos tell the tale.)

Finally, the two houses, still unable to resolve their own conflict, realized that the situation had grown past their ability to control and that some end must be put to the matter. They decided to settle things by single combat (as was the way of that era), and each house chose, trained and groomed a champion to represent them. The Mazda would be championed by one called Ahura, tall, fair and beautiful; the Manyu chose the most powerful among them, the dark, brooding Angru. The two confronted each other in a lush valley, accompanied by their most fanatical followers. An ancient Acanthus master, hoary Zurvan, came out of seclusion to observe the proceedings.

The two champions leapt at each other the instant their eyes met, and it is said that the front ranks of devotees were blasted out of existence by the forces unleashed in the very first exchange of blows. The mages who remained fell upon each

other in frenzied bloodlust as the mighty warriors fought round after round. Ahura Mazda called down lightning, thunder and meteors from the Heavens, but Angru Manyu spun the world around him so that all attacks flew wide, incinerating the foliage and leveling the mountains for leagues about them. Ahura reached into Angru's burning heart to wrench out his magical energy, but devious and subtle Angru retained enough of his essence to conjure up howling nightmarish shapes from the depths of Ahura's proud soul, the shadows cast by his radiant consciousness.

The heat of their battle sent storm fronts billowing in all directions; some tell that the monsoons of Hind were interrupted for centuries while the sacred rivers of antiquity — the Indus and Ganges, the Tigris and Euphrates, even the Nile — ran backwards in horror. (The Amu Darya, closest to the conflagration, simply evaporated.) By some accounts, the Heavens opened up and a shining host of angels with burning weapons rode forth to clash with a slavering demonic horde that erupted from subterranean caverns in an earthquake that was felt from Siberia to the Congo. With every round, it seemed that Ahura Mazda would end the fight with a killing blow, but each time Angru Manyu twisted away and returned with some underhanded cut.

At the last, it was hoary Zurvan, sickened by the devastation wrought upon his cherished land, who decided that enough was enough. Unable to separate the deadlocked combatants, he called upon his most powerful magic to pluck them forth from the stream of time itself, and sent them spinning into the infinitude of eternity, off to some unknowable shadow realm or perhaps even into the Abyss itself. There they would continue to battle forever while the world remained safe from their unholy backlash.

Meanwhile, their struggle had demolished an entire mountain region, flattening verdant hills and searing green valleys to leave behind a desolate wasteland hammered by sun and haunted by devils. Today the natives of Afghanistan call it the "Dasht-i-Margo" or Desert of Death. This scar upon the earth's surface was as nothing compared the trauma inflicted upon the racial memory of humankind. The rivalry between two groups of mages, escalated into a clash between Heaven and Hell, had carved the notion of an absolute dichotomy between pure good and pure evil deeply into the collective human psyche — without leaving any sort of objective criteria for distinguishing one from the other.

The echoes of that battle still resound throughout Western civilization, and the simplistic notion of an unequivocal dualism ingrained in the minds of most Sleepers remains a stumbling block for both Obrimos and Mastigos working to enlighten humanity. While recriminations cropped up from time to time, today mages of both Paths have reached an understanding that they are each reciprocal aspects of a greater Supernal unity. Modern speculation holds that insurgents from the Seers of the Throne in both camps instigated the escalation of the Manyu-Mazda rivalry. The Mastigos consider this story a lesson in self-control, a reminder that, while conflict and competition may be necessary spurs to growth and spiritual development, if allowed to continue unchecked and uncontained they can easily destroy that which grows and develops.

Recorded History

Though the winds of antiquity have erased Ayeshau's footprints, her name would continue to echo throughout the Fertile Crescent and adjacent regions, where the Mastigos maintained the greatest influence upon human civilization that these mages ever enjoyed during the 2nd and 3rd millennia BCE. The very atmosphere seethed with demonic activity as Warlock-kings attempted to create cultures that reflected their cosmologies, rivaling similar contemporary efforts by the Moros in Egypt and China, the Obrimos in India, the Acanthus in Europe or the Thyrsus in Africa, Siberia and the Americas. (This is not to suggest, of course, that the cultures of these regions were shaped exclusively by mages of those Paths, but simply that they appear to have been the predominant influences at the dawn of recorded history. Chaldea, for instance, bears the unmistakable stamp of the celestial metaphysics of the Obrimos, while a wide variety of Supernal ideals are reflected throughout the spiritual life of India.)

The Mastigos rulers, to achieve their greatest successes, integrated the notions of organized religion and an extremely centralized hierarchical power structure — thus sowing the seeds of their eventual downfall. All their temporal power was channeled through an elite hierarchy of priests who systematically directed the details of the burgeoning agricultural economy in the nascent cities with such ruthless efficiency that urban populations expanded beyond the Warlock-kings' abilities to reliably control the areas. Social institutions such as temples, schools and businesses grew so large and evolved so fast that even the Awakened could not keep track of everything. The Mastigos had, in effect, called up demons in greater numbers and strength than they could effectively control.

This became apparent during the 1st millennium BCE, when a member of the Persian school of mages proclaimed himself a prophet and publicly preached an extremely biased and overwrought account of the battle between Angru and Ahura. Infamous in Mastigos lore as a power-hungry upstart, Zarathustra — or in Greek, Zoroaster — reopened old wounds by talking up this shameful episode, rekindling on a grand scale the old enmities between the tribes involved in the Manyu-Mazda wars. Zarathustra's cosmology was uncompromisingly bipolar, dividing the universe exclusively between extremes of light and dark, or good and evil. This attitude gradually combined with the strong antipathy toward demonic magic that accompanied the vigorous monotheism spreading among

various Semitic tribes and gaining strength in the waxing kingdoms along the Mediterranean coast. Over the course of the millennium, the power of the Warlock-kings waned steadily, fragmenting Mastigos influence into a number of scattered isolated cults. By the dawn of the Common Era, St. John described the situation thusly in his Book of Revelations: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, and is become a habitation of devils, and a hold of every unclean spirit."

Solomon

As monotheistic philosophies, with their increasingly patriarchal social structure, gained influence among the peoples of the Near East, the cultures fostered by the Mastigos — along with those of other Supernal Paths — found refuge among the diminishing remnants of the older matriarchal paganism. The ruling mages of Sumeria and Babylon were reduced to sharing power within a dwindling number of insular tribes and kingdoms. This is not the way of mastery, though, and so the Mastigos worked to insinuate themselves into the newer rising cultures.

The key figure of this period would be the third king of Israel, Shelomoh Bar Dawood, remembered by Arabic-speaking peoples as Sulayman and known in English (via Greek) as wise King Solomon, son of David. Solomon's mother was Bath-Sheba, and her story demonstrates how the pagan Mastigos were able to gain a toehold in Hebrew culture and the world-spanning monotheism that descended from it. Biblical lore says that King David was struck by the sight of Bath-Sheba bathing, had an adulterous affair with her and arranged to have her husband, a subjugated Hittite, sent to war, where he died. The Mastigos, however, hold that Bath-Sheba orchestrated the whole thing, seducing David in order to place her son on the throne of Israel. (Though born of adultery, Solomon escaped the tag of "bastard" when David married the widowed Bath-Sheba.)

"Bath-Sheba" can be translated as either the "house" or "daughters" of Sheba, a matriarchal kingdom where the deposed line of Warlock-kings maintained a stronghold. Mysterium scholars trace "Sheba" back to "Yishuva," the name by which Ayeshau is remembered in Semitic tongues. A small but prosperous kingdom, Sheba was to remain an influence on Solomon throughout his life. Nearly every neighboring pagan creed was represented among his 700 wives and 300 concubines, but the lavishly expensive courtship between him and Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba, receives detailed attention in Jewish, Christian and Muslim scripture. These same traditions claim that Solomon "fell into idolatry" by the end of his life.

Besides commanding demonic forces (by means of angelic authority, monotheistic sources are careful to specify), Solomon could direct winds and all the elements as well as speak the language of birds and ants. At one time or another, in fact, Solomon exhibited most Supernal styles of magic, suggesting that he benefited from tutoring by all varieties of magical teacher, probably gained through the pagan contacts of his many marriages. A few scholarly mages actually go so far as to speculate that Solomon was some sort of *über*mage who Awakened to all the Supernal Paths within a single lifetime. This heretical view is not generally accepted, of course, but its proponents point out that the vaunted Seal of Solomon is a pentagram, emblematic of the quintuple Supernal World. (Some confuse this seal with the hexagram favored by his father, King David.) The majority of mages agree, however, that, if Solomon was indeed one of the Awakened, he almost certainly drew his power from the Watchtower of the Iron Gauntlet.

Whatever the case, Solomon's reign illustrates the capacity of the much-maligned Mastigos — not to mention other Paths — to inculcate their powers within temporal and religious authorities openly antithetical to the mages' purviews. Their tenacity in doing so could still be seen almost 2,000 years later in the (admittedly brief) papacy of Sylvester II (999–1003). The pontific name means "Spirit of the Grove" and would seem to betray some Acanthus influence from European paganism. It was said of this Pope (mostly by his opponents) that he had a lifelong affair with a "demon mistress" named Meridiana; some interpret this as "Mary-Diana," signifying a fusion of matrist values within Catholicism and the older goddess of the hunt that Mastigos identify with the Atlantean Widow Daanau. Furthermore, it was whispered that Sylvester II had sold his soul to the Devil in exchange for a sculpted bronze head that could speak and foretell the future. This curious artifact told the Pope that he would not die "except at Jerusalem." Sylvester never visited that Thrice-Holy City, but perished in the Holy Cross of Jerusalem Church in Rome, where his tomb is still observed to sweat whenever some prominent person dies.

Hasan-i-Sabbah

The cultural strains fostered by the Mastigos even managed to survive amid the intensely patrist dominion of Islam, where the name of Sulayman ibn Daud is yet venerated for the virtue of wisdom. The explosive impact of the Arab Conquest, fueled by a fanatic Bedouin ethnocentrism, however, required that the Warlocks employ more devious and lethal strategies to secure their influence. The most infamous example of this is, of course, the Order of Assassins founded by Hasan-i-Sabbah.

In Hasan's name we already hear the echoes of the Widow of the Fall. The original Arabic rendering of his name, ibn-Shaybah, has been interpreted "son of the Matriarch" and indicates descent from the ancient kingdom of Sheba. The matrist current of Bilqis survived in the so-called Sabaeans, an ethnic group whose culture was one of the first casualties of Islamic expansion. Their culture, with its Mastigos influence, was somewhat preserved in Shi'ite Islam through the efforts of the Prophet's daughter Fatima and her husband Ali, as some

pagan thought was tolerated under the Fatimid Caliphs. One sect that flourished under the Fatimids was the Ismaili, into whose mysteries Hasan-i-Sabbah was initiated.

Hasan was Ismailism's most fervent missionary in the 11th century CE and was determined that his sect should survive the waning of the Fatimids, whose reign would end in less than 100 years. Seizing the north Persian mountain fortress of Alamut through treachery and guile, he built a small but highly efficient army of suicidally devoted fanatics that has become the stuff of legend. Writing two and a half centuries later, Marco Polo described an elaborate process of brainwashing, wherein converts were drugged with hashish and woke up in a lavish mountaintop garden. There, a troop of women trained in all the arts and sciences of pleasure brought the men to the heights of erotic ecstasy while the "Old Man of the Mountain" (a title taken by Hasan and his successors) explained that they were being given a taste of the Paradise prophesied for the faithful by Muhammad. Any who perished in the Old Man's service, he averred, would be instantly transported back to the garden and enjoy its delights for the remainder of eternity.

Some modern Sleeper scholars dispute certain details of Polo's account. The derivation of the English word "assassin" from the Arabic *hashishin*, for instance, has been questioned. Hashish and related cannabinoids had been widely used for both medicinal and recreational purposes since before recorded history, so other, more powerful, psychoactive substances—such as *Amanita muscaria*, belladonna or the deadly nightshade revered by the Mastigos — were probably used. Awakened scholars find even this insufficient to explain the overwhelming success of the Assassins' neurological reprogramming. The order produced deep cover agents of outstanding intelligence, motivation and mental clarity. The Mastigos assert that this could only have been accomplished with demonic aid.

The "Paradise Garden" of Alamut, they surmise, was actually modeled upon the seductive aspect of Pandemonium, not unlike the practice of so-called sacred prostitution in the temples of ancient Mesopotamia under the Warlock-kings. The garden was displayed to visitors to entice them to take up Ismaili doctrine, but primary function of the garden was during the "positive reinforcement" or reward phases of indoctrination, behavioral conditioning and brainwashing programs. Demonic psychology and the Mind Arcanum were used to create cognitive dissociation disorders wherein a demonic alter ego was implanted to produce "sleeper agents" unaware of their mission. The latent demon personality was triggered into activity either by a prearranged signal from Alamut or when specific circumstances or conditions occurred, such as the Assassin's target coming within arm's reach. Even the women who plied their hedonic skills in the garden were probably channeling — or even possessed by — "demons" of allure and seduction. And these were not the only products of the Order of Assassins; scholars, poets and mystics also lived and worked at Alamut and other Ismaili strongholds, compiling and reifying a body of esoteric lore and practice that can only be guessed at by moderns, since the entire operation was sacked and burned by the Mongols in the 14th century CE.

Meanwhile, Christian leaders who had to contend with the Assassins during the Crusades felt the need to fight hellfire with hellfire, so to speak, and delved into their own remnants of Mastigos practices. Pope Boniface VIII (1294–1303), accused of sorcery and heresy by Philip IV of France, was said to have regularly conjured demons to negotiate and seal pacts, to have bound an imp into his ring, and one night while still a cardinal to have sacrificed a black cock in his garden. He confessed to his pacts on his deathbed while, according to the chronicles, "so much thunder and tempest, with dragons flying in the air and vomiting flames, and such lightning and other prodigies, that the people of Rome believed that the whole city was going to be swallowed up in the abyss." Boniface was exonerated of these charges posthumously in 1312.

Later there was Sixtus V (1585–1590), born Felice Peretti, who authorized Philip II of Spain to launch the Spanish Armada against England. As a young Franciscan sent to investigate the Archbishop of Toledo for heresy, Peretti stirred up animosity among the Spanish, who later accused him of gaining the papacy through a pact with Satan. One of the terms of this pact was that he would hold the office for at least six years. Sixtus once sentenced to death a young man who, according to the law, was one year too young to be executed. Citing this instance, the Devil reneged on the sixth year of the pact, and the Pope, having no rebuttal, died. Warlocks still use this story to illustrate the importance of adhering literally to one's word when dealing with demons, but also admit that the entire tale may be no more than a pun upon the papal name that Peretti chose, "the Sixth Fifth."

Cases such as these, even if apocryphal, demonstrate what modern Mastigos have come to call "the curse of the Warlock-kings." These stories exemplify the inherent fallacy of using the techniques of self-mastery to build a centralized hierarchic structure of absolute power that enslaves others, violating Supernal order. Such hubris can only lead to corruption, they warn, as when Aleister Crowley, a son of Puritans who eventually proclaimed himself to be the Great Beast foretold in the book of Revelations, enlisted the aid of Victor Neuberg to perform an invocation in the desert south of Algiers in 1909. Neuberg's account of the incident is a spectacular read, combining high adventure and high fantasy in a single night of metaphysical pyrotechnics, but chills the souls of the Awakened. The entity that Crowley unleashed upon the world was Choronzon, known in qabalistic tradition as the "Dweller in the Abyss."

It is no coincidence that talk of demonic activity often surrounds people claiming to have been victimized by shadow

government conspiracies or errant military and intelligence agency mind control experiments. Power cliques are naturally drawn to imitate those the cliques view as successful in their goals, and usually have no qualms about maligning those who stand in the cliques' way. It is believed that John Dee acted as a spy for Queen Elizabeth. Dennis Wheatley, the writer most responsible for demonizing Crowley as a black magician, also penned a number of espionage thrillers. William Peter Blatty, author of *The Exorcist*, was Policy Branch Chief of the U.S. Air Force Psychological Warfare Division. Another Pentagon bigwig decorated for his work in MK-ULTRA and other mind control programs, Michael Aquino, broke away from Anton Szandor LaVey to establish the wide-ranging Temple of Set, and was once named in a child abduction/abuse case. The Mastigos of the modern day must deal not only with the denigration of their methodology in popular folklore, but with the fact that the tools they once gave humanity for self-empowerment have been increasingly used for the oppression of the human spirit.

Hell in the Vatican

The Catholic Church guards one of the most diverse repositories of demonic lore in the world, some written in the infallible hand of its leaders. When Mastigos strive to recover ancient secrets now lost, the following names are likely to crop up in their research.

Pope Leo I (440—461), also known as "Saint Leo the Great," fought the Manicheans in Italy; the Manicheans were dualists who owed much of their philosophy to Zarathustra and perpetuated the prejudices spawned in the Manyu-Mazda conflict.

Leo III (795—816) wrote a grimoire entitled the *Enchiridion* and presented it to Charlemagne.

Gregory VII (1081—1084) was pronounced a sorcerer by Synod of Bressanone on June 25, 1080.

Pope Honorius III (1216—1227) wrote a grimoire called the *Black Book* or the *Grimoire of Honorius the Great*, the introduction to which traces the Solomonic current in Christianity — as well as reiterating the Manyu-Mazda bias — by relating the following words of Jesus to St. Peter: "I give unto thee the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and unto thee alone the power of commanding the Prince of Darkness and his angels, who, as slaves of their Master, do owe him honour, glory and obedience."

Benedict XIII, who held the title of antipope from 1394 to 1417, was believed to hold "continuous traffic with spirits . . . [to keep] two demons . . . in a little bag . . . and [to look] everywhere for books on magic."

John XXIII, Benedict's contemporary in antipapacy (1410—1415), supposedly used *The Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage* to avoid being deposed by the Council of Constance.

The Devil's Due

Some say demons are so infinite in number that any possible sort of demon that can be conceived can be found somewhere in Pandemonium, if one but knows how to identify it. Others opine that demonic entities are called into being by the will of the summoner, given form by expectation and projected upon the world at large; only those whose identities have been recorded and passed down generations retain their distinct personae.

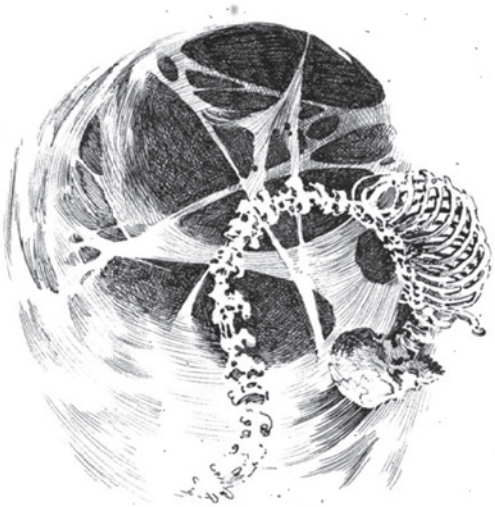
Crowley, in preface to *Aceldama, A Place to Bury Strangers in, A Philosophical Poem, By a Gentleman of the University of Cambridge*, 1898, describes God and Satan fighting for his soul: "God conquered — now I have only one doubt left — which of the twain was God?"

The Realm

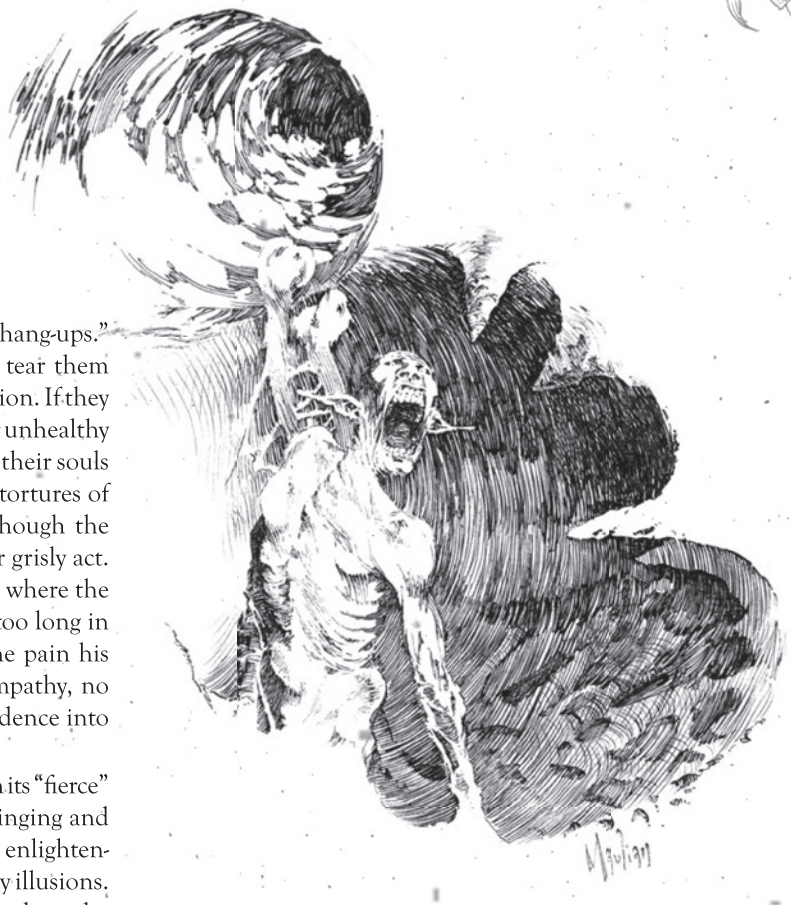
Pandemonium is often equated with the Jungian idea of the "Shadow" of the "collective unconscious" — that which is rejected, and hence identified with (but not necessarily identical to) rejects from other Paths, i.e., fallen angels, Unseelie Fae, rabid beasts, evil dead, etc. Some instead consider Pandemonium as a sort of possible future of a mass Awakening without the necessary disciplined preparation. Each demon is in a sense a human wielding unwieldable power, their desires and urges magically expressed without benefit of spiritual guidance.

The Realm is most often experienced by Awakening mortals as a labyrinthine network of caverns, an inside with no outside, populated by rioting hordes of misshapen figures. The maze has no beginning or end, and its geographical/topographical layout does not remain consistent over time (i.e., trying to draw a map of it is useless), but certain "kingdoms" exist and retain their identity, if not their expression (what they look like, the size of the cavern they occupy, etc.) for those who understand just what it is that they represent (e.g., the seven Vices).

All of the Supernal Realms can be viewed (from one perspective) as aspects of the soul — or more accurately, as stations on the soul's journey to ultimate transcendence. In this scheme, Pandemonium is the realm where the soul is scourged of all that is unworthy, made to let go of its negative







mental complexes, neuroses, derangements and "hang-ups." Demons descend on the newly arrived souls and tear them limb from limb — a symbolic autopsy of their condition. If they are "unclean" — still carrying derangements or other unhealthy mental burdens — their "bodies" are tortured until their souls relinquish their hold on what is taints them. The tortures of the damned are not ultimately malicious, even though the demons leer and caper in joy as they perform their grisly act. They are a form of surgery to remove a tumor, one where the patient is not allowed anesthesia, for he has lived too long in a stupor and must now consciously experience the pain his taint has caused others; without it, there is no empathy, no sharing in the soul's of others, and so no transcendence into a greater unity with them.

Tibetan Buddhism has an inkling of this concept in its "fierce" deities, those gods who literally scare a person's clinging and grasping to material life from him, leading him to enlightenment via fear. For some, terror is necessary to destroy illusions. In this sense, Pandemonium is a sort of Purgatory, where the soul prepares for its next step, although from here it can either rise or fall, depending on the soul's choices.

Arcana "Laws"

The Mind/Space pair is how mages understand the "eversion" (turning inside-out) of the soul that occurs during demonic interaction. In Pandemonium, whatever is inside the individual's head becomes objectified as part of the landscape and personified as the inhabitants thereof; likewise, all the external forces that acted upon the individual in the Fallen World, the totality of life experience up to that point in time when the individual enters Pandemonium, is condensed into mere memory, the contours of identity from which the individual acts, the gauntlet through which the will is focused.

Matter is that which demons lack. In Pandemonium there is no weight, solidity or inertia to hamper and contain action. (Except for those thoughts and memories of weight, solidity and inertia that the individual brings with him, and which can therefore hamper and contain his own actions.) In the Fallen World, a demon's existence is contingent upon the physical traces of its identity — its name pronounced (vibrating the physical air), its sigil inscribed upon paper, metal and stone, the chalk triangle that contains its visible manifestation and the chalk circle that keeps out its influences and actions, the artifacts and edifices constructed using the knowledge that it imparts, the ruins that result from its destructive urgings, the tears shed by the pain it has caused, the children generated from the lusts it inspires.

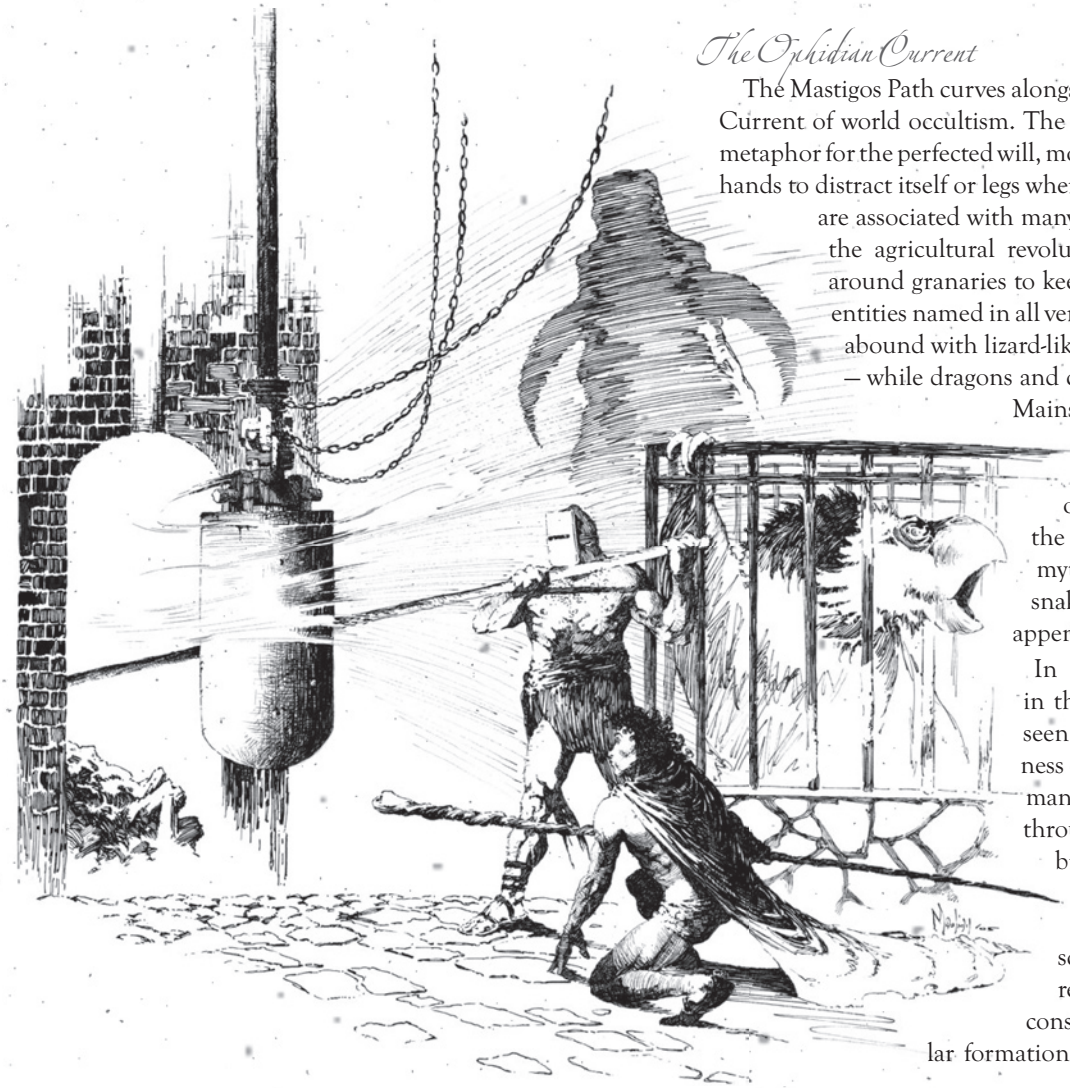
Another possibility is that matter, as the Arcanum defines it, is simply something over which demons have no power. Beyond having the power to bind demons, Matter is anathema to them because it is not truly present in the Realm of Pandemonium. Some theorize that Pandemonium is a "denser" Realm than others, one that is closer to the Material Realm. The Realm is drawn by the "gravity" of material bodies and so is ruled, partially, by material laws. Just as a Sleeper cannot change the laws of physics, for he lives within their rule, so a Warlock has trouble altering them via his Supernal connection, for his realm "orbits" too closely to the laws of fallen matter.

Correspondences

The Watchtower of the Iron Gauntlet most frequently appears as a forge, identified with the succession of Bronze and Iron Ages coinciding with the Mastigos heyday in the Near East. An Awakening soul is driven into a crucible chamber while the activity of the surrounding demons rises to a feverish pitch, driving up the heat to an infinite degree whereupon the soul must harden itself into a psychic blade that can carve its name into the forge's wall or be consumed utterly. Knife and forge both connote manufacturing and industry, wherein the human species far exceeds all others; Warlocks maintain that their Path is the most anthropocentric, as opposed to drawing magic from the Supernal reflected in beast and branch and day and night—the Mastigos circumvent the Abyss by their own power of invention. Reinforcing this anthropocentrism is the fact that, of all the mythic beasts represented in Path heraldry, the manticore is the only one with a human face.

Part of the symbology of the Iron Gauntlet concerns the gathering and directing of separate forces to act together toward a common purpose. Some accounts of Pandemonium have a greater demon riding on a palanquin, or sedan-chair, carried by a coordinated troop of lesser demons. One is reminded of Solomon's flying carpet: a sheet of green silk borne aloft by a flock of birds grasping its edges. Prehistoric Warlocks taught the domestication of animals as subordinates rather than the shamanic partnership fostered by other Paths. Gathering silk from silkworms is another example of this; in fact, profits from the Silk Road helped fuel the Mesopotamian economy under the Warlock-kings.

The Mastigos' veneration of the plant called deadly nightshade reflects a general fascination with venoms and poisons, also related to the Ophidian Current (below). Nightshade in particular has properties that can be used to demonstrate the Warlock's control and precision; if properly prepared and ingested in exactly the right quantity, nightshade can grant visions of the Kingdom of Nightmares — but any miscalculation results in a lethal dose.



The Ophidian Current

The Mastigos Path curves alongside the so-called Ophidian Current of world occultism. The phallic serpent is a perfect metaphor for the perfected will, moving only forward, without hands to distract itself or legs whereby to flee or fall. Serpents are associated with many pagan deities dating from the agricultural revolution, as snakes were kept around granaries to keep rodents in check. Those entities named in all versions of the *Keys of Solomon* abound with lizard-like faces and serpentine tails — while dragons and crocodiles serve as mounts. Mainstream popular media often depicts demons or devils with at least one reptilian feature, just as the manticore and many other mythological chimeras have snakes for tails, heads and other appendages.

In some sense, the Serpent in the Garden of Eden can be seen as representing the willfulness of man, even against divine mandate. Intentionality arises through the oldest part of the brainstem adjacent to the cortex, that part of the limbic system known to science as the reticular or reptilian complex. Demonic consciousness arises from reticular formations wherein any sort of idea

or feeling accretes a self-sustaining identity apparatus with its own survival imperatives and territorial strategies. In 20th century UFO lore, the most frightening alien antagonists are the reptilians from Zeta Reticuli.

Glimpses of a Higher World

Aleister Crowley said, "'The Devil' is, historically, the God of any people that one personally dislikes." The Warlock who seeks to uncover the historical traces of her Path is effectively swimming upstream in a current driven by cultural intolerance. This may suit her just fine, as the Mastigos way is that of strengthening oneself against opposition. Crowley wrote extensively about the supremacy of the will, and propounded several methods for honing it against opposition — as did one of his most notable opponents, Georgei Ivanovitch Gurdjieff. Both were similar to spiritual weightlifters, constantly adding weight and increasing the number of repetitions to build psychic muscle, and so both are sources of inspiration for the Mastigos. (It must be noted, however, that Crowley's reputation for deviltry was initially self-proclaimed, and so is seen as a juvenile conceit by the enlightened, who declare his work to be a great place to begin one's studies, but a lousy place to finish.)

For straightforward Western demonology, the Warlock can ask for no better primer than the *Goetia*, a veritable catalogue of named demons and their purviews, appearances, rank and so on. "Goetia" is from the Greek for "sorcery," its root denoting one who howls or wails, suggesting the "barbarous names of evocation" from *The Chaldean Oracles* and distinguished from the theurgy of the Zarathustran mages. The *Goetia* was part of a larger work called the *Lemegeton*, attributed to King Solomon and mentioned in a Gnostic text from the Nag Hammadi library. Sleeper occultism credits Solomon as the founder of Goetic magic; nearly all surviving sources of this tradition are based upon some version of the *Mafteah Shelomoh*, or *Claviculae Salomonis Regis* or *Keys of Solomon the King*. Linguistic analysis reveals that many Goetic names are derived from the Mesopotamian divinities of eld. The renegade Mao Shan priests of China, better known for their work in the field of necromancy, possess a very similar work detailing the names and specialties of the *kuei* — Chinese for "demon" — with nearly identical numerical associations, magic squares and astrological correspondences.

The Western Mastigos must inevitably come to terms with the Christian notion of the Devil as the paramount of all evil. Earlier Hebrew tradition simply describes a tester of the soul, and Semitic names for this entity in both Judaism and Islam — Shaytan the Tempter or Iblis the Accuser — suggest a kind of prosecutor in the court of ultimate judgment. Christianity equates this figure with the fallen angel Lucifer, cast down for his attempt to claim the throne of the Almighty and whose story is best told in *Paradise Lost*. Milton's famous line — "Better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven" — recalls the Manyu defiance of the Mazda attempts to subjugate them. A more concise and accessible version of Lucifer's rebellion comprises a scene in Peter Cook's script for the film *Bedazzled*, the favorite movie of many modern Mastigos.

Comparative mythology discloses some similarity between Lucifer and the Greek myth of Prometheus, who was punished for stealing fire from the gods and giving it to humankind. "Lucifer" is Latin for "light-bringer" and so the serpent that tempts the first couple to taste the fruit of knowledge can be seen as gifting them with the light of consciousness. (This transformation of the story seems to be told in reverse order, with the punishment of Lucifer occurring before this crime was committed. But the Awakened point out that this is but a reflection of events in the Supernal World and takes place outside of time.) The favor that Prometheus shows to humanity stems from the fact that he was the one who created humans, thus linking him to the Demiurge of Gnostic Christianity, a false or secondary god that made the physical universe but was himself merely a product of the true Creator of spiritual existence.

The Demiurgic creator is revered by the Yazidi tribe of Kurdistan as the Peacock Sultan Malik Taus (or Tawus). Malik Taus is represented by a brass idol, violating the Muslim injunction against idolatry and depicting animals and humans in art. Despised as devil-worshippers, the Yazidi are persecuted by their Kurdish neighbors who mostly belong to an organization called the Ahl-i-Haqq ("People of Truth"), which preserves the Zarathustran current in Islam. The Yazidi even identify themselves as devils, or at least the descendants of devils. Gurdjieff relates how, as a boy, he and his friends used to tease Yazidi kids by drawing a circle around them. Like a Goetically conjured entity, the Yazidi child could not be made to cross the line and leave the circle, even if pushed or pulled by others.

Within Islam, there are the Sufi esotericists who propose an interesting variation on the plight of Iblis. When Allah first fashioned man from a clot of blood, He exalted this new creation by ordering all the Heavenly hosts of angels to bow down before it. Iblis refused, for to do so would have constituted a violation of the First Commandment — to worship none other than God. Though punished for his disobedience to a direct order, the Devil could be lauded as the first and most ardent monotheist. The Mastigos point out an interesting paradox in this story: that an infallible divinity should issue contradictory commands, effectively enforcing disobedience upon whichever action the recipient of the order takes. Cast in the role of scapegoats, the Warlocks take pride in their nickname, which means "oath-breaker."

Some Muslim sources say that Iblis is the chief among the *djinn*, who are thus equated with demons, but most other sources describe the *djinn* as having free will to choose good or evil for

themselves, just as humans do. Nevertheless, popular stories such as those collected in the *Kitab Alf Laylah Wa Laylah* ("The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night," known in the west as *The Arabian Nights*) clearly identify the *djinn* as the spirits bound by Solomon. Mastigos students are encouraged to study this work closely, as it presents many examples both good and bad of how to negotiate with and command spirits that must adhere to the letter of what is said (as in a pact) but are subtle and devious in subverting the intent of the word. Arabic lore also names a distinct tribe of demons that live in the sun, the *zebani*.

For the Mastigos, the Devil represents a state to which they aspire, that of supreme command over all demons. Outside of Judeo-Christian-Islamic monotheism, however, this office is not necessarily evil or punishable. In Hinduism, for instance, the lord of goblins, demons and restless wandering spirits is Shiv the Destroyer, who hates disobedience and tramples the heads of rebellious demons. Shiv wields a skull-headed club taken from a dwarf-demon that was summoned against Shiv by atheistic ascetics and a blazing trident that, when driven into the ground, summons a vast demon army.

The Hindu name for the land of demons is Janastan—another possible correlation for the *djinn*, as much of the *Arabian Nights* originated in India. The ruler of Janastan was Khar, who waged many battles with the hero Ram. Some startling variations of demonic lore are revealed in the stories of these battles. Ravan, brother of Khar, ousts the god of wealth from the kingdom of Sri Lanka, forces the other gods to be his menial servants, and prays to Brahma for invulnerability against the attacks of gods and demons. Ram's wife Sita is protected from demonic assault when her brother draws a magic circle around her. Prahlad, the son of one the twin chiefs of the Daityas, a tribe of giant demons, takes up the worship of Vishnu even though that deity slew Prahlad's uncle. Prahlad eventually becomes a Daitya chief himself and is taken to Paradise when he dies.

Another cognate of the lord of demons comes from the Yoruba of Africa, by way of Voudun and Santeria—the "Master of the Crossroads," Maitre Carrefour. Also known as Papa Legba or Eleggua, he is the god of sorcery, a master magician and the owner of keys to all doors—a Solomonic figure elevated to the rank of deity. He controls access to the *Eshu* (also rendered "*Exu*"), horned gods of mischief and the unexpected, divine tricksters who, like Hermes, act as messengers to the other gods (*orisha*). In his guise as Eshu Ogguanilebbe, Eleggua arranges violent accidents to feed his friend, the bloodthirsty entity Oggun. In the strain called Umbanda (or in Brazil, Macumba), Lucifer is known as "King Exu," Beelzebub as Exu Mor (death), and Ashtaroth as the Exu of the Crossroads. The very worst of all these entities is known only as the Exu of the Closed Paths. Other cultural parallels from this tradition include the Old Black Man and Old Black Woman (*Preto Velho* and *Preta Velha*, respectively), spirit guides somewhat comparable to the Black Man of European Satanism and el-Eswad in the Middle East. Warlocks are known as *Quimbanda*, those who traffic with the lower mischievous spirits.

Another spiritual subculture found in the Americas, and possibly related to Voudun, are the snake-handler sects of charismatic Christianity. Although they do not profess traffic with demons, they are still of interest to the Mastigos. The Christian snake-handlers' mastery of self is demonstrated through the control of fear, loathing and pain reflexes originating in the reptilian complex—and externalized in their mastery of these dangerous animals, not unlike the snake charmers of India.

Foreign Devils

The barbarous names found in the *Goetia* have been overused as aliases of the Christian Devil, and so are practically household words in the West. The diligent and curious Warlock might be more interested in the more exotic appellations given below.

Hindu:

Hiranyaksha — one of the twin chiefs of the Daityas, slain by Vishnu.

Hiranyakashipu — the other twin chief of the Daityas, father of Prahlad.

Holika — sister of the Daitya twins, who tried to burn Prahlad but he was protected by Vishnu.

Marich — prevented from abducting Ram's wife by magic circle.

Shurpanakha — sister of Khar, fell in love with Ram and offered to eat his wife.

Vira-bhadra — leader of the army summoned by Shiv's trident.

Voudun/Santeria:

Eshu Oku Boro controls life and death.

Eshu Bi is the king of mischief who stands in corners.

Eshu Alayiki is the bringer of the unexpected.

Eshu Laroye lives in houses behind closed doors.

Eshu Aguère dwells on hills.

Eshu Kaloya abides in the marketplace.

Eshu Latieye wins every bet no matter how high the odds.

The Key to the Lock

Thomas Aquinas (1226–1274), in his *Sententiae*, wrote, "Magicians perform miracles through personal contracts made with demons." Though likely intended to encompass all non–Christian mages (and, of course, unAwakened charlatans) the statement clearly describes the practice of the Mastigos. A demon is, in one sense, an intention given an identity, and the Mastigos works by identifying the various intentions at work in her world in within herself, then interacting with them through bargaining, coercion, trickery and any other method that accomplishes the object of her will.

The earliest phases of Mastigos training are concerned almost exclusively with identifying and manipulating the student's own inner demons, specifying and controlling first those fears and desires of which the mage is consciously aware, then evoking the stronger and subtler forces hiding from awareness in the subconscious and learning to negotiate with them, before ultimately submerging into the collective unconscious where the powers that move the world at large must be confronted and dealt with.

Most improvised spells can be described as the temporary creation of a very minor, rudimentary demon, formed from the stuff of the mage's own psyche. Driven by the mage's own intent and clothed in the Imago of the spell, the demon leaps forth like a thought-form springing from the brow of the Demiurge, performs the task for which the demon was created and then effectively ceases to exist, dissipating back into the mage's mind.

Appearance

Warlocks are generally precise and immaculate in their self-presentation, but always appropriate within whatever society they find themselves. A Mastigos attending a black tie party looks the part, and probably displays flawless manners and a cunning wit. Likewise, a walker on the Path of Scourging who enters a biker bar, for whatever reason, dresses appropriately and knows the proper slang, customs and (if necessary) fighting techniques to blend in. It wouldn't be entirely accurate to say that the Mastigos take pride in their appearance, wardrobe and manner. If anything, they take pride in being able to make a good first impression, to put others at ease. It's almost impossible, after all, to exercise control over others if one isn't in control of oneself, and personal appearance is a very basic and obvious way of demonstrating this mastery of self.

Not all Mastigos subscribe to this philosophy, however. Some take pleasure in working against social custom, bucking appropriateness and expectations with the intention of getting their subjects' attention. Indeed, being seen as a "rebel" or as unconcerned with societal strictures can be a superb way to make oneself known and respected, but, once again, the Mastigos isn't concerned so much with how he looks as with what that look inspires in others. No matter what Mastigos wear, such mages tend to be direct. They make eye contact, speak clearly and, most importantly, pay attention when others speak (and even when they don't; body language can say worlds to the perceptive Mastigos, even without involving magic). The intensity of Mastigos attention can be somewhat off-putting. Neophyte Mastigos, having learned the first principles of the Mind Arcanum, must take care to avoid unnerving people by reading them too well.

Devil's Mark

During the Warlocks' Awakenings in Pandemonium, many Mastigos are rewarded with a Devil's Mark, some physical deformity that brands them forever. This can take the form of an extra finger, toe or even nipple, but is sometimes more subtle — an odd pattern of pigmentation resembling a birthmark might appear under the hair or on the sole of the foot, and might even take the shape of a face or an arcane symbol. While some Mastigos are horrified to discover these alterations, most take them as marks of favor or as badges of honor from the Supernal. Some Mastigos look at the "freaks" of carnival sideshows, and wonder how many of them were born with their deformities and how many visited the Abode of Demons?

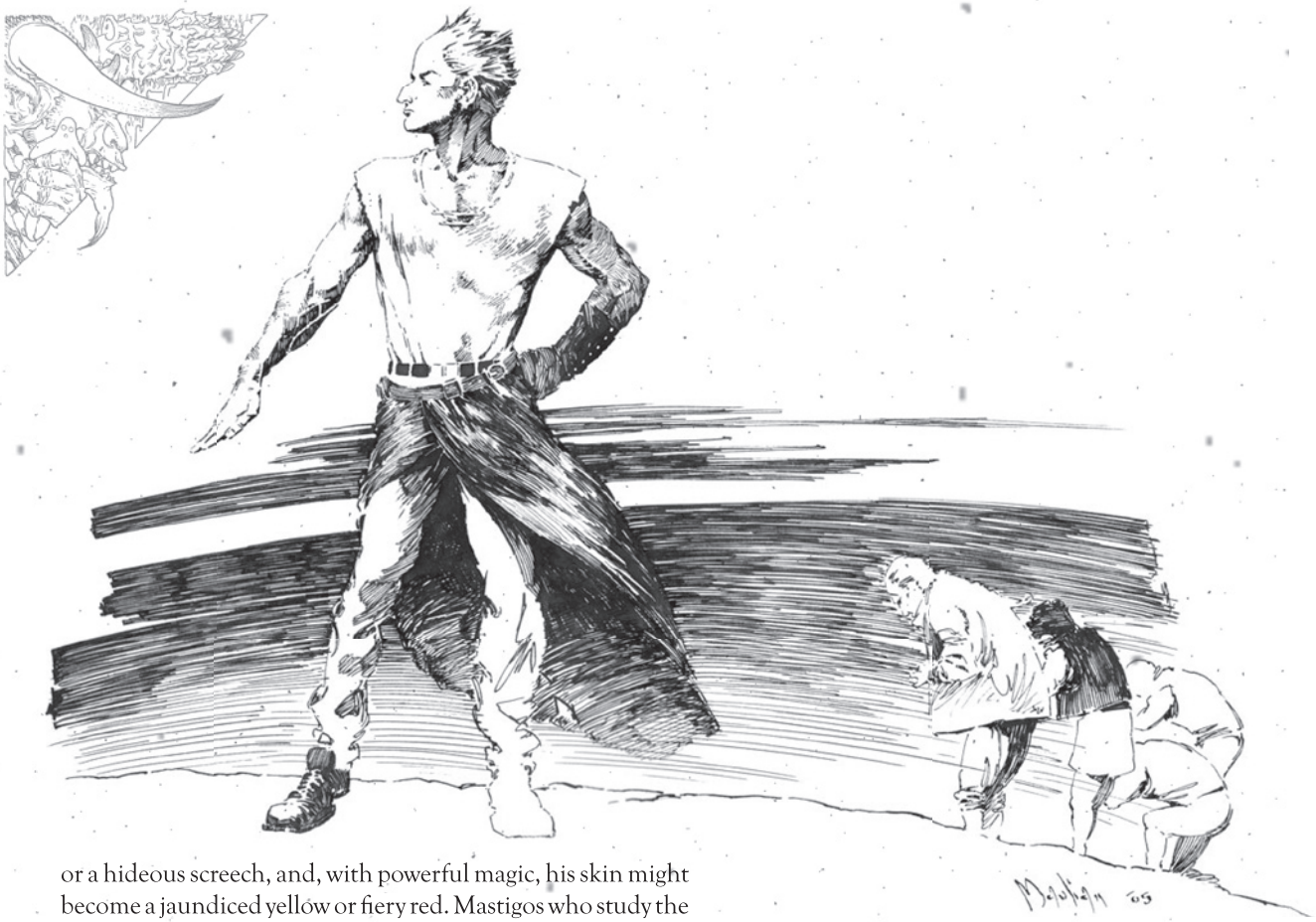
Nimbus

The "Nightmarish" nimbus described on p. 96 of **Mage: The Awakening** is only one way in which the magic of the Mastigos might express itself. Thought is made real in Pandemonium, and thus anything that the Warlock can think of might accompany his magic. Below are some alternate possibilities for Mastigos nimbuses. More than with other Paths, Mastigos nimbuses tend to have a pronounced affect on onlookers.

• **Cacophony:** It begins with a ringing in the ears, and grows to an indistinct roar. Any nearby creature with normal hearing experiences first discomfort, then pain as the din increases. Powerful magic might even cause nosebleeds and headaches in listeners, but, interestingly, the noise created by such a nimbus cannot be recorded and does not appear on sound recording equipment — the sound exists only in the minds of the listeners. This nimbus is appropriate for any Mastigos specializing in the Mind Arcanum or who learns the Forces Arcanum.

• **Claustrophobic:** Hallways tighten, vehicles appear to collapse in on their passengers and elevators become mobile coffins. Even people who don't suffer from claustrophobia feel smothered, and actual claustrophobics often hyperventilate in panic. Powerful magic makes the Mastigos herself seem larger than life, standing tall in front of the witnesses no matter how far away she is. Obviously, a Warlock specializing in Space magic might exhibit a claustrophobic nimbus.

• **Demonic:** The mage's eyes glow with unholy light, and his shadow might grow horns, a tail, wings, extra limbs or other inhuman features. His voice gains a booming bass resonance



or a hideous screech, and, with powerful magic, his skin might become a jaundiced yellow or fiery red. Mastigos who study the Arcanum of Spirit or Life might display this nimbus.

• **Destructive:** The demons of the Kingdom of Nightmares seem to reach into the Fallen World via this nimbus, clawing and biting at anything they can reach. Their influence manifests in various ways. Brittle materials might crumble, flammable items might begin to smoke and glass might crack. These effects vanish when the magic ends, of course (the nimbus doesn't actually cause change in the Durability of items), but powerful magic might leave behind scoring apparently from long claws. Mastigos studying the Arcanum of Death might show this nimbus.

• **Disorienting:** The landscape around the mage seems to spin, causing vertigo and nausea in onlookers. Even on steady ground, witnesses can't seem to find their footing and might stumble or reach out for handholds. Depth perception and spatial relations suffer, and, with powerful magic, witnesses might lose their senses of direction for the rest of the day. Warlocks specializing in either of the ruling Arcana of Pandemonium might exhibit this nimbus.

• **Infectious:** The mage's nimbus induces some spreading trait. This might be a cough, a laugh or even a phrase in an unknown language that all who hear are bound to repeat at least once. Powerful magic can even cause a visible pox on the flesh of witnesses. This "disease" fades as the magic does, but can leave witnesses feeling unclean and "marked" for days. Warlocks who study the Life or Fate Arcanum might display this nimbus.

• **Sensual:** Onlookers experience all sensory input keenly, from the scent of nearby perfumes to the sound of the mage's voice to the feel of their own clothing. This experience isn't necessarily unpleasant; depending on what stimuli the person is receiving it can be enjoyable or even erotic. As the power of the magic increases, though, even a silk shirt can start to feel like sandpaper and the gentlest whisper can feel deafening. A Warlock studying Matter as well as Mind might display this nimbus.

• **Sexual:** No matter how he actually appears, the Mastigos exudes sex appeal. Onlookers cannot help but become aroused, although the focus of the arousal isn't necessarily the mage (for instance, a truly heterosexual man won't feel desirous of a male Mastigos, but any woman in the immediate vicinity probably starts to look extremely tempting). Extremely powerful magic might even cause spontaneous orgasm in onlookers. Such a nimbus is appropriate for Mastigos who study Mind or Life.

• **Subjugating:** Onlookers, animal and human both, abase themselves before the mage. His will is law, his words infallible. Nothing seems to escape his notice, and his gaze might seem benevolent or terrible depending on the nature of the magic. Powerful spells might cause inanimate objects to bend, as though bowing before him. Mastigos specializing in the Mind or Fate Arcanum might show this nimbus.

• **Symphonic:** Everything moves in concert. Ambient sounds harmonize together, and voices take on a lyrical quality. The movement of feet against the ground results in a cello-like note,

while an inhaled breath produces a woodwind sound. The mage is the conductor of the symphony of the world, if only for a few moments. Powerful magic can cause listeners to weep at the beauty of this music. This nimbus is appropriate for Mastigos who study the Arcanum of Forces, Fate or Prime.

Sanctums

One Mastigos might want to live far from the throngs of humanity, while another lives in the heart of the city, surrounding by the teeming masses. In either case, though, Warlocks are stringent, even obsessive, about the rules of their homes being followed. These rules aren't necessarily important, but visitors must follow them simply because they are the rules of the house. Often, such rules are as simple as removing one's shoes before entering or refraining from swearing in the house, but some Warlocks have more elaborate customs that they impose upon guests.

Privacy is paramount to the Mastigos — even if his home is open to others, some part of it must be sacrosanct. This area, often a workshop or library but sometimes a dojo, chapel or dungeon, is where the mage practices his Arcane arts. Since this often involves communing with the forces of Pandemonium (in a real or symbolic sense), intruders are not welcome, both for the mage's protection and for their own. A Mastigos' inner sanctum is normally protected by a series of locks both mundane and magical, or is made to appear uninteresting. Some Mastigos set up "false sanctums," containing hoary-looking tomes and blood-covered skulls that, in actuality, mean nothing but look convincing. An intruder seeing such a room might collect any number of "potent mystical artifacts," some of which the Warlock might have enchanted with Prime to appear important and magical, and never press on to the real treasures just behind the next door.

Mastigos often warn potential intruders of the dangers of trespassing upon Warlock lands. Such warnings can take the form of simple signs (the signs might read Trespassers Will Be Shot, but bullets are often the least of an intruder's problem). Many Mastigos, however, favor symbolic warnings that indicate the danger to interlopers without spelling it out. Venomous snakes and feral-looking (but well-trained) dogs make superb pets for the Mastigos, and some Warlock sanctums are host to flocks of ravens as their association with death and ill omens provides warning. These creatures might be more than simple animal guardians, though; a Mastigos with a familiar might leave it to guard his lair while he is away or working on a lengthy spell.

Inside, the Warlock's home is usually neat and tidy, but even if it appears to be a cluttered mess, the home has an order that only the mage understands. Maintaining perfect control over one's surroundings is an extension of the will so important to the Path of Scourging, but, as with the mage's appearance, the form that this control takes is ultimately unimportant. What is important is that the mage is in control; if his sanctum appears cluttered, it is because he makes it so. And considering that even a novice Mastigos can find any object in his sanctum with a simple spell, this control is easily found.

Mastigos tend to be hyper-focused on their endeavors, and so an extended spell or the process of learning a rote can consume their attention, leaving little time for the regimented upkeep that their sanctums require. In such cases, a Warlock's home can appear in disarray. Magical tools sit where the mage left them, tomes and scrolls lie open waiting to be referenced and the whole place exudes an aura of vibrant activity. Even in such chaos, the mage is in control — he knows exactly where everything is and what it was last used for.

While much of the Mastigos' security is dedicated to keeping intruders out, most Warlocks also spend some time making sure nothing escapes their sanctums. Mages who practices Goetia must take care that the personifications of their own Vices do not run rampant, and even Mastigos who do not



follow this path sometimes call up beings that cannot be released into the Fallen World. Protective spells bar egress from the mage's home, and sometimes a visitor might find odd items such as chalk, herbs, brass figurines or other protective measures affixed to the insides of the Warlock's doors.

Rites

The Fallen World contains the magical power that the Mastigos need to fuel their arts. Finding it, however, isn't easy, but the Mastigos excel at finding hidden things.

Oblations

The following are some examples of the oblations typical to the Path of Scourging. A mentor typically teaches the Mastigos her first oblation, sometimes without telling his pupil of his intent. Likewise, when and if a Mastigos joins an order, she might learn one of these rituals from a more experienced member of her Path. Over time, though, many mages develop their own rituals for drawing Mana from Hallows that are consistent with the Warlocks' own magical practices.

Mastigos oblations fall into three general categories: adversity, awareness and dominance.

Oblations of Adversity

The Mastigos thrive when swimming upstream. Enlightenment and knowledge, to them, go hand-in-hand with overcoming tribulation. The oblations of adversity require that something or someone be present to act as an opponent to the mage. Indeed, two Mastigos can engage in such oblations together, but only the victor reaps the benefit. These oblations do not function unless both participants try to win — a mage cannot simply bring a sparring partner to a Hallow and have him take a dive, and then claim the Mana.

Oblations of adversity can sometimes take less than the normal hour required for such rites.

• **Combat:** Probably the simplest of the oblations of adversity, this one just requires the mage to engage in battle. Normally, oblations require an hour, but if the mage suffers at least one lethal wound (but still wins the fight), he gains the Mana upon victory. A fight in which no one is hurt is hardly a true struggle, however, and although a mage can simply spar to use this oblation, he must do so for the entire hour. The combatant challenging the mage doesn't have to be Awakened, and indeed doesn't have to know what is happening. A Mastigos might simply pick a fight with a passerby (provided the Hallow in question is in a location that allows for passersby, of course).

• **Paradox:** This is a dangerous oblation, and requires the participation of another mage, normally but not necessarily another Warlock. The mages engage in a contest of vulgar magic, and try to avoid the deleterious effects of Paradoxes for as long as possible. Containing the backlash within one's own body is permissible (and indeed encouraged), but using Mana to mitigate the Paradox is not, since it rather defeats the point of the oblation. The participants can rest between spells (useful for healing the damage incurred from containing backlash). The first one to suffer from backlash loses the battle, meaning it can conceivably be over in moments or take several hours.

• **Wits:** Easily the least damaging of the oblations of adversity, the oblation of wits is usually represented by a game of chess, Go or another strategy game. Again, the mage must win the game in order to claim the Mana, and must play against a sentient being. Spirits, demons, other mages and even Sleepers are permissible opponents, but the mage can't simply bring a computer with a chess program and hope to gain Mana out of it. The reason for this is that the point of the oblation isn't necessarily winning the game, but learning to outthink and "psych out" an opponent. This is impossible with a computer, since machines don't "think" as such.

Oblations of Awareness

These oblations require the mage to know his surroundings and, more importantly, himself. He uses such rites to test his endurance and tolerance for pain (or even pleasure) for the hour required for the oblation. More powerful mages stretch these rites out for hours or even days, pushing themselves to the breaking point to hone their already formidable wills.

• **Endurance:** The mage pushes himself physically during the oblation of endurance. He might perform sit-ups or lift weights. Some Hallows provide the means to perform these oblations by their very geography. A Hallow located on an island might allow a Mastigos to swim to it from the mainland, collapsing on the shore just as the Mana starts to flow into his Pattern. Stopping to rest during this oblation is permitted, but only for a minute or so — anything longer disrupts the rite and requires the mage to start over in a day.

• **Measurement:** The Arcanum of Space allows for precise knowledge of distance and length, and mages studying these principles sometimes perform this oblation as a way to advance in their training. The Mastigos extends his senses as far out from the Hallow as he can, and takes a mental measurement of every object within that diameter. Height, depth and width are all magically divined, and the mage takes careful note of the shapes and patterns formed by these dimensions. The Hallow itself might change its physical surroundings as Mana seeps into the area, and this can make for some very interesting features indeed, which this oblation reveals to the Warlock.

• **Self-Scourging:** This oblation is similar to the oblation of endurance, with one major variation — the mage endures pain for the entirety of the rite. This pain is usually self-inflicted, as to allow another being to exert this kind of control is to

abandon one of the key precepts of the Path of Scourging. Normally, the mage whips himself with a scourge or lash, or cuts into his flesh with a very fine blade. Some Mastigos feel, however, that before one can truly command others, one must know what it means to give up all control (and then, some Mastigos just enjoy this sort of thing). If the mage does give another being permission to cause the Warlock an hour of agony, he must abandon control entirely. No safewords, no spells to dull the pain, no means of escape is permissible (not if the mage still wants the Mana, that is).

Oblations of Dominance

Finally, the oblations of dominance require that the mage exert her will on another person. Unlike the other Mastigos oblations, the victim here cannot be complicit in the mage's endeavor, and so most Mastigos use Sleepers for such rites and then alter or erase their memories later. As such, the mage must be careful, lest in the course of the oblation she commit an act of hubris and lose Wisdom.

Oblations of dominance must end at the Hallow from which the mage intends to draw Mana, but needn't begin there. Convincing the subject to accompany the mage to the Hallow is normally part of the oblation. The mage must know where the Hallow is and have been there before, though.

• **Coercion:** The mage uses threats, bullying and even physical violence to bring his subject to the Hallow. Once at the Hallow, the mage often "marks" the subject, magically or physically, with a sigil indicating the mage's dominance. This mark can be removed normally (if physical) or dispelled (if magical), but the mage has achieved his goal and thus gains Mana.

• **Seduction:** The Mastigos uses words, sex appeal or even bribery to get her subject to the Hallow. Once there, the mage might or might not fulfill any promises, but if she does so, it is for her own purposes, not because she is bound by her word. While this might seem callous, it underlines a fundamental difference between the Mastigos and the inhabitants of Pandemonium. The demons must adhere to the letter of their promises. Mastigos, being human, are bound only by their choices, and that is the essence of will.

• **Taming:** This oblation doesn't necessarily begin outside the Hallow, because the oblation involves the Mastigos breaking the subject's will rather than convincing or forcing her to do something. Over the course of the hour, the mage engages in psychological or even physical torture, stripping the subject of her will and resistance, until she will do anything that Mastigos desires. Whatever tactics the Mastigos uses are usually accompanied with covert Mind spells, since this kind of domination is difficult to enact quickly. In any case, any Willpower the subject spends is added to the amount of Mana the mage receives at the end of the hour. Of course, this oblation always requires a roll to avoid degeneration (two dice).

Formulae

Magical energy flows through all things. Normal humans, in their everyday waking state of mind, tend to divert and disperse this flow through stray thoughts, daydreams, nervous habits and the suppression of emotional responses. The Awakened will of a mage overcomes these distractions to channel and focus magical energy toward a specific goal. When performing an oblation, the mage becomes a conduit and container for the energy flowing from a Hallow. To ensure that energy flows freely through the conduit and is fully contained within the mage, all distraction must be banished from the mind. How can a Warlock accomplish this, when her very soul is imprinted with the chaos of Pandemonium and Nightmare — the veritable epitome of distraction?

All mages create names and, often, sigils into which magical energy can be bound. All Paths retain some knowledge and use of Atlantean glyphs, but the Mastigos seem to share with Obrimos and Moros a particular passion for applying elaborate calculation and abstraction to their work. Complex mathematical equations and tongue-twisting polyglottal conglomerations are used to specify, describe, call and control the denizens from the Kingdom of Nightmare. Mastigos oblations generally involve working out complicated mental tasks and striving for a high degree of geometrical precision in any visible expression, be it an inscription or a gesture in the air. Warlocks compound the recitation of barbarous names by rearranging, repeating, transposing, subtracting and adding syllables or letters. Letters are, in turn, given numeric correspondences subject to further calculations and manipulations, or are associated with specific images or ideas. The name of a demon can be expressed as — and in the act of oblation must be envisioned simultaneously as — a mathematical equation, a geometrical figure, a series of images and a complex of ideas, as well as a string of marks signifying a sequence of vocalized sounds.

Some describe the cumulative effect of all this contrived hyperactivity as drowning out the general chatter of the waking state of consciousness, chatter that normally diverts and disperses the internal flow of magical energy. This can be

compared to the scene in *Star Trek* in which a renegade computer is incapacitated by being made to calculate the last digit of *pi*. An oblation is sometimes defined as a ritual of offering to a deity; the Warlock, in effect, offers up her attention in exchange for clear and unobstructed access to a source of magical energy. True to her subtle and contradictory nature, she distracts the process of distraction itself.

Dedications

Four dedications common to the Mastigos Path are presented here. These dedications are by no means the only ones possible for Warlocks, but represent some of the key factors of the Path of Scourging. Mechanics for dedications can be found in the Introduction.

Way of the Contrary

The Mastigos is a catalyst, causing change and progression by altering the conditions in which others exist. The Way of the Contrary makes this a way of life. The mage following this dedication acts as a voice of opposition, a Devil's Advocate, a contradictor to whatever seems to be the status quo. He won't endanger himself or others in this role (usually), but is quite willing to tempt a sober man to drink or a wife to infidelity just to see whether they can resist the temptation. Likewise, the contrary might find himself arguing some extremely noxious viewpoints simply to push others to a reaction.

This dedication is a difficult one to observe for long, especially if the mage is part of a cabal. He must learn to be delicate in his choices of opposition; he can't simply contradict everything that others say, because he isn't provide adversity so much as annoyance by doing that. He must find ways of making others work for their goals (if he feels they aren't already). One important factor is that he can never outright prevent someone from achieving an end. If a man is attempting to woo a woman, the Mastigos is free to seduce her (or him, for that matter), but cannot kill her or otherwise make the courtship impossible. If the mage does so, the vow is broken and the dedication ends (and the mage probably risks degeneration, depending on the particulars).

Vow of Precision

This dedication tests the mage's ability to be truthful and accurate. The mage is forbidden to lie, either by commission or omission — that is, everything she says must be either objectively true or *clearly* stated as opinion. If shown a plank of wood painted black, the mage can state that the wood is black only on the side that she can see. Of course, since the mage is probably capable of "seeing" both sides at once via Space magic, she might be able to say that both sides are black and still be correct. This likewise extends to others' states of mind. The mage cannot guess what another is feeling, but can use magic to verify a supposition before speaking.

The vow of precision does not necessarily require the mage to correct others when they make erroneous or unsubstantiated statements, but some do anyway. Anyone repeating a rumor or urban legend is challenged to offer support, and if the speaker cannot do so the mage gently (or not so gently) suggests that the speaker choose his words more carefully. Mages under the vow of precision are somewhat trying to be around, but they are also meticulous and calculating in extremis, and this makes them valuable allies.

Path of Indulgence

The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom, or so the saying goes. Some Mastigos undertake a dedication to that effect, letting their Vices rule them until it literally hurts. This dedication is common among Mastigos preparing to cast Goetic spells. They feed their basic urges until they no longer gain pleasure (and, in game terms, Willpower) from their urges anymore, hoping to dull the Vice's power over them through a kind of desensitization. Of course, overindulgence can cause bodily, mental or spiritual harm to the mage, and the Warlock might actually have to cast spells in order to correct these problems if he wishes to remain true to the dedication.

In game terms, a mage on the path of indulgence can only gain Willpower from his Vice once per day, rather than once per scene.

Society

Mages of other Paths look askance at their Mastigos comrades. All mages have their foibles, of course, but the Mastigos actually consort with *demons*, and that's enough to make anyone nervous. That said, the Mastigos play a valued and integral role in Awakened society. This section examines the particulars of that role.

Forums

Warlocks meet for a number of reasons. Sometimes, members of the Path come together to witness contests, duels and other methods of proving superiority over one another. Not every mage enters into such contests with the intent of winning, either. Sometimes, it's simply helpful to know where one stands in comparison with one's peers. Therefore, Mastigos forums might include mystical contests (including the Duel Arcane), marksmanship contests involving firing around corners and hitting targets behind the shooter and contests of will wherein one mage tries to force another to drink from a cup or cut his own flesh with a knife. A Warlock might walk away sickened, scarred or humbled, but at least he knows his place. To the Mastigos, for whom "place" is such a subjective concept, this can be comforting.

Mastigos forums aren't always so pleasant, though. Sometimes, Warlocks meet to discuss threats wrought by other mages or even mortals who have summoned something beyond their control. Although Mastigos don't necessarily know how to call up spirits or ghosts, they do understand the ramifications of letting another being trump one's will. A pattern of possession or spiritual violence in the area might pull the Warlocks together, to discuss the problem and to see whether any of their number has gone missing.

Paths

As mentioned in the History section, some Mastigos view the other Paths as the inheritors of the five Widows of the Fall, the contemporaries of their Queen Ayeshau. In these tales, the Widows and their descendants (that is, the other Paths) aren't portrayed in very flattering lights. The Sons of Danau (the Acanthus) are seen as fickle and mercurial enchanters who let the world rule them, rather than exercising their power over fate. The Descendants of Layalau, the Moros, do not benefit from their traffic with the dead, as it locks them in the past rather than allowing them to move forward. The Daughters of Devau, the Obrimos, are most reviled, as they actively search for masters rather than making their own way. Finally, the Spawn of Lluanau, the Thyrsus, are viewed as a primitive step backward in human evolution.

These views, however, only color a minority of thought within the Mastigos Path. While the Warlocks might have reservations about the other Paths, the Mastigos can also recognize what these mages have to offer.

Acanthus

The Acanthus scare the Hell out of the Mastigos. The Acanthus' command of Time isn't what frightens the Warlocks, although that's certainly something to be respected. Time, though, ceases to matter when one considers an eternity in Pandemonium. Time is generally subjective to the mind anyway, and while the Mastigos appreciate the Acanthus' oracular ability, the Warlocks don't see it as much of a threat.

The Enchanters' prowess with the Arcanum of Fate, however, is what the Mastigos find terrifying. Fate can sanctify oaths, binding a mage to his word, and that means that that the mage is no longer his own master. Likewise, the Acanthus can erode binding oaths — does that mean that Acanthus mages could free demons from their obligations? The power of Fate is something that the Mastigos don't intrinsically understand (though many of them learn it), and the implications when considered next to the concepts of will and obligation.

Moros

The somber Necromancers and the tightly controlled Mastigos actually have much in common. The Moros, just as the Mastigos, deal with otherworldly entities on a regular basis and must maintain the upper hand in dealing with these creatures. Also similar to the Mastigos, the Moros are highly focused and disciplined. The point of friction between the two Paths is that their discipline takes different forms—a Moros focuses on living well because death is a breath away, while the Mastigos focuses on self-discipline because the alternative is slavery. The difference is subtle, but important.

Many Mastigos are curious about ghosts, though, and this leads them to the Moros. What is it that allows a mortal to linger as a ghost? Does it take an indomitable will to do so, or is the ghost a pathetic creature so ruled by its own emotions that it cannot pass on to the next world? Mastigos who find Moros friends and cabal-mates learn that the answer, infuriatingly, is often "Both."

Obrimos

The Mastigos have long had a strange relationship with organized religion. They have used it to further their own agendas, but always seem to wind up in an adversarial (or at least undesirable) role. That said, the role of the adversary is often more fulfilling than the role of the hero or paladin (and besides, as the saying goes, the villain is the hero of his own story). The Obrimos, then, represent the *yang* to the Mastigos' *yin*, and this of necessity leads to the some friction between the two Paths.

Not every Obrimos is a religious fanatic; not all of them even deserve the title "Theurgist." And yet, both Aether and Pandemonium are home to beings of great power, and an Awakening mage on either Path cannot deny that these beings can be commanded or can acts as commanders. The Mastigos abhor being servile, even before supposedly benevolent beings, because the Warlocks' first experience with such creatures was in the Kingdom of Nightmares. Likewise, the Obrimos might look at the Mastigos and see egocentric willfulness, but that's only because the Obrimos don't understand the dangers of the Supernal. The Obrimos, the Warlocks sometimes mutter, got off light.

Thyrsus

The denizens of Pandemonium differ sharply from the inhabitants of the Primal Wild, and indeed the ephemeral beings of the Shadow. But the Shamans don't always understand that, and make the mistake of referring to the demons as spirits of lust, pain or some other human foible. This saddens and sometimes enrages the Mastigos — the beings they encounter during their Awakenings are *demons*, with all that implies. They cannot be safely called upon to empower Fetishes or forced to speak through a medium. If the demons have entered a human being, the Mastigos has an exorcism ahead of him. Calling demons "spirits" is a dangerous underestimation.

All of that said, the Thyrsus actually do make superb exorcists, provided they can be convinced that what they're up against isn't a run-of-the-mill spirit. Likewise, the Mastigos are

nothing if not practical, and antagonizing the mages most capable of healing their comrades doesn't pay.

Orders

The Mastigos can be found in all five of the orders, but the Warlocks have different reasons for gravitating toward each of them.

The Adamantine Arrow

A Warlock among the mages of the Arrow is probably a spy or reconnaissance expert. After all, the ability to read the minds of a foe or know an enemy's position when there is still time to benefit from it is an immeasurable asset in a fight. And some Mastigos come away from their Awakenings with the desire (some would say driving need) to protect humanity from the demons of Pandemonium. The Adamantine Arrow provides the best training for this kind of life.

That's not to say that Mastigos are incapable of front-line combat, of course. A Warlock with a pistol and a good command of the Space Arcanum can stand in the open and kill his opponents without sustaining a single wound. The Mind Arcanum allows for forms of combat that don't leave scars and can harm even the most heavily armored foe. Some members of the order don't approve of using such tactics, thinking them more appropriate to the Guardians of the Veil, but the Mastigos simply point out one of the main tenets of the Arrow: *Adaptability is Strength.*

The Free Council

The Warlocks who join the Free Council are true libertines, hoping that all of humanity can eventually have the same freedom that the Awakened enjoy. After all, mastery of the self cannot happen while one is blind to much of the world. Helping Sleepers to Awaken and protecting them from magical or supernatural dangers until they do appeals to some Warlocks.

On the other hand, not every Mastigos is so scrupulous, and the "free market" model of the Free Council appeals to mages who wish to buy and sell magical secrets. Since Mastigos are so adept at figuring out a potential buyer's highest price, or prying their secrets from them without paying a thing, the Free Council can be a cornucopia of wealth and power for the Warlock.

Guardians of the Veil

One of the most common choices of orders for the Mastigos, the Visus Draconis offers the Warlocks an environment in which adversity is constant, secrecy is imperative and manipulation is the bread of life. Mastigos Guardians are superb at setting up cults and double-blinds for unworthy seekers of magic, and, what's more, doing so without being noticed. The order requires its members to be self-sufficient, and, conveniently, this is one of the key traits of the Mastigos.

Of course, the leaders in the order know that they must watch their Mastigos operatives carefully. Hubris is a subtle poison, and when a mage can alter the minds of those around him, he can quickly believe that he is beholden to no one but himself. This attitude in a mage empowered by his order to kill is extremely dangerous, and when a Mastigos of the Veil goes rogue, he can be nearly impossible to find.

The Mysterium

Not a common choice for the Warlocks, the Mysterium teaches that knowledge is power, but that it has a price. Those sentiments ring true for the Mastigos, and some on the Path dedicate their lives to tracking down, interpreting and completing the secrets of the past. After all, the demons of the Kingdom of Nightmares were around before the Fall of Atlantis, and surely some of the lore necessary for controlling or banishing them was lost in the War. The Mysterium might find it, but only the Warlocks can interpret it.

The role most common to Warlocks of the Mysterium is probably that of the Censor. The Mastigos are disciplined and self-reliant, and flatter themselves that they know what knowledge should remain hidden and what should be available to the orders. Since the Warlocks are typically well-organized and thorough, they excel at this task. It does happen sometimes, though, that a Mastigos succumbs to temptation and opens a book he deemed unfit for any mage to read. Since he might be the only person on the continent who knows what the book contains or even that it exists, the results might go unnoticed until too late.

The Silver Ladder

Perhaps the most common choice of allegiance for the Mastigos is the Vox Draconis. It allows a Warlock with some sense of responsibility to the Sleepers of the world to protect them, but at the same time keeps the unAwakened squarely in their place (that is, subordinate to the mages). The Silver Ladder is the order of leaders, and that is the natural place for the regimented, controlling Mastigos.

The problem is, of course, that in order to be a leader one needs followers, and the Warlocks aren't seen as the trustworthiest of mages. A Mastigos has to prove himself worthy of devotion, time and again, and, of course, avoid any implication that he might be in service to the demonic entities of Pandemonium (which is ironic, of course, because the Mastigos go to such lengths to make sure that they serve only themselves). A Mastigos never really proves himself as a leader, because his followers are constantly questioning whether he is magically compelling their allegiance. Of course, the Mastigos encourage this self-examination of motive, as it forces the other mages to always evaluate whether they are in control of themselves.

Sleepers

The Mastigos' prevailing attitude toward Sleepers is that they are a resource. Until they Awaken, they are blind, easily manipulated and generally expendable, and therefore can be used as necessary. This attitude varies greatly in degree. Most Mastigos don't send Sleepers to their deaths or into situations that their fragile minds can't handle, but are quite willing to alter their memories or dreams as necessary. Some Mastigos, though, are quite happy to send Sleepers through portals into unknown territories just to "test the waters," or offer up their bodies or souls as bargaining chips when dealing with powerful entities from beyond the Fallen World. Such callous action can cost the mage Wisdom, of course, but the Mastigos don't always see this problem until it is too late.

Some Warlocks have a quite different attitude toward Sleepers. These Mastigos see their Awakenings as a call to action — having been made aware of what lurks in the Supernal, they feel compelled to protect the denizens of the Fallen World. This attitude is perhaps reminiscent of the fearful creed of the Banishers, but the difference is that the Mastigos don't see their magic as wrong or evil. It is a tool, a weapon and a shield. Those who lack this shield should still benefit from it.

Character Creation

Chapter Two of **Mage: The Awakening** lists a number of sample concepts appropriate for the Mastigos. This section takes a closer look at each one and discusses why they are so appropriate to the Warlocks.

• **Creepy Infernalist:** It might seem redundant to call someone who deals with demons and other infernal creatures "creepy," but such descriptors are all but unavoidable for the Mastigos who chooses this road. An infernalist doesn't necessarily empower or admire the monsters with whom he deals, but he recognizes that they do intrude upon our world and that the odds are more in humanity's favor if he helps structure the arrangement. Like many Warlocks, the infernalist is a pragmatist of the highest degree, and therefore is usually welcome among the Guardians of the Veil. Spirit is a common area of study, as well as Mind (to keep oneself strong in the face of temptation) and Occult, obviously an important Skill. Subterfuge and Academics are likewise crucial. Hallow is a good Merit choice, as is Sanctum, since such activities require privacy and magical power.

• **Itinerant Demon Slayer:** Some Mastigos feel that demons *can't* be bargained with, however. These Warlocks believe that these creatures must be slain wherever possible and locked out of the Fallen World in any case. Maybe the mage is a devout Christian and takes to heart Christ's admonition



to defy the Devil, or perhaps the Mastigos has lost someone personal and is fighting to avenge. In any event, the demon slayer follows these creatures wherever they might be found. As such, Skills and Merits that help in establishing cooperation quickly (Persuasion, Empathy, Status and Contacts, for instance) and in traveling (Stealth, Streetwise, Survival, Resources) are invaluable. Space is paramount between the Ruling Arcana and most demon slayers add Prime and Forces to the mix. Obviously, the order of choice is the Adamantine Arrow.

• **Struggling Antihero:** Traditional notions of "good" and "heroism" crumble in the face of Pandemonium. Power bestows responsibility, but given the source of that power, the Mastigos must tread lightly. It is impossible to wield the knowledge gained in the Abode of Demons and not take on a bit of taint. Some Warlocks do fight it, though. They use their magic and their indomitable will in the name of their cause, even though that magic of necessity requires manipulation and dominance over others. Such mages can find homes in the Silver Ladder and the Adamantine Arrow, although some Mastigos take their idealism to the Free Council. Any Arcana can serve these characters, and Skills and Merits depend very much on what the character is trying to accomplish and how she intends to go about it.

• **Unseen Assassin:** A man falls dead of a stroke. No one in the room noticed the mage enter or leave, and they certainly wouldn't accuse him of murder even if they had seen him. The work of the Mastigos assassin is subtle, usually carried out from afar. This means, though, that the mage needs to know his target well enough to establish (and then erase) sympathetic connections. What must it do to a mage's sanity to get to know someone and then kill him? The Guardians of the Veil is the most natural fit for an assassin, although the Mysterium sometimes needs to silence those who know too much. The Path's Ruling Arcana are of most immediate benefit, although assassins often study Life as well. Skills such as Firearms, Science (chemistry) and Medicine are helpful, as are Merits such as Contacts (to help learn about a target) and Resources (for high-end equipment).

• **Haunter-of-Nightmares:** A mage doesn't need to cause a target physical damage to destroy her, of course. The cunning and skillful Warlock can enter a person's dreams and deprive her of rest, learn her secrets and eventually bring her most terrible fears to life. Such actions are nothing short of psychological torture — but some people deserve torture. Mind, of course, is the Arcanum of choice for the haunter-of-dreams, and Death and Spirit can also be of benefit. Academics (psychology), Occult and Intimidation are good Skill choices, and the Guardians of the Veil is the obvious choice of order.

• **Realpolitik Diplomat:** Morality and ideology are fine points of discussion, but someone needs to lead, to make things happen, to look objectively at a situation. Mastigos make superb catalysts, and they are often pragmatic in the extreme. As such, when a situation calls for closed-door negotiations and politics without pandering to interests, a Warlock is the best bet. Such characters are best put to use in the Silver Ladder, of course, although the Free Council's Warlocks have advanced the order's causes much over the years. Mind, obviously, is the crucial Arcanum, though Fate is also handy. Politics, Academics and almost all of the Social Skills are helpful. As for Merits, the diplomat should be well-known in the right circles (Fame, Contacts and Status) and probably have some backup in case things go wrong (Retainers, Familiar).

• **Carnival Dream Interpreter:** Most carnival psychics, of course, are con artists or cold readers (see p. 37 in the chapter on Moros), but a Warlock in such a position has a unique opportunity to help Sleepers overcome their psychological hang-ups via magic. Likewise, a mage might be looking for those about to Awaken or for people who, unless treated or dealt with, will become dangerous in the future. Mind is necessary for this line of work, and Fate and Time are also good choices. Any order might employ a Warlock in this capacity, though the Guardians of the Veil and the Mysterium are probably the most likely to do so. Persuasion and Empathy are necessary tools of the trade, as is Subterfuge and at least a little Expression (to put on a good show). Merit choices include Dream, Contacts (other readers), Encyclopedic Knowledge (gleaned from reading minds for a number of years) and Fame/Resources (if the mage becomes really good at his work).

New Merit

Daimon (●●●)

Effect: "Daimon" is the original Greek word from which the modern English "demon" is derived. The Greeks regarded the daimon as an intermediary between the gods and man, distinct from the free-roaming malevolent spirit of Mesopotamia. Comparable to other Paths' guardian angel, faerie kin, power animal or ancestral protector, the daimon shares an intimate personal link with the bearer of this Merit, but also partakes of the Supernal Realm that is the daimon's birthplace. A mage's daimon is far older than the mage, at least in an ontological sense, and has access to knowledge, wisdom and modes of thought or being that are beyond mortal ken. Mages of any Path can purchase this Merit.

This Merit acts similar to the Dream Merit (p. 82 in **Mage: The Awakening**). The mage with this Merit, however does not need to spend an hour in sleep or trance to receive a clue from his daimon. He merely spends one turn in meditative concentration, and the Storyteller rolls his Wits + Composure in secret, with the same results as described for the Dream Merit, except that success provides only one clue. This clue comes from the daimon, and similar to dream clues, is cloaked in allegory and metaphor.

LIBERATORES



Humankind exists in a state of slavery. Children are reared for blind obedience to their superiors, whether adults, authority figures or even bigger children. Education consists only fractionally of actual instruction — and then only in the procedural details of menial tasks — and mostly of conditioning towards the unquestioning acceptance of monotony, regimentation and redundancy. Negative reinforcement — pain and deprivation — requiring constant maintenance for diminishing returns, is extensively employed, while positive reinforcement — pleasure and reward — which maintains itself and encourages progress, is seldom used, if not rejected outright. Dissent and alternative views are discouraged with such severity that the mere thought of them is stifled even before the thinker can utter them aloud. The modern adult emerges as a mass-produced domesticated robot, interchangeable with any other, his own slave driver and self-censor. The society formed by such people thus becomes an entity unto itself, bearing no responsibility to its disposable individual members, its insular communities enclosed and contained, its communication monitored and information flow regulated by living automata. Even the society's ruling class is bound to a system beyond its control, bred and groomed for power by the same process of threats and punishment, its soul trapped within massive walls of denial erected against the degradation and debasement it inflicts upon its race.

Inhabitants of wealthy and civilized countries may consider the preceding to be subversive rhetoric, at best an overstatement of the price a society pays for its own security or a puerile emotional response to vague and ill-defined historical and sociopolitical forces. But the rest of the world understands that the obedient slave who has never tasted the lash can easily convince himself that he is free, his servitude offered voluntarily to well-meaning masters. And the Liberatores realize that this is only the tip of a most chilling iceberg. For the truth about the human condition, they point to the ghetto and shantytown, to dungeons and basements and shipping containers, to containment camps and torture chambers and rape rooms, to the barbed wire fence between desert and fertile field, to the windowless monolithic building, to the sweatshops of Saipan and the tourist brothels of Dubai, to the eyes of the kiddie-porn "star" and the screams of the toddler strapped to the racing-camel's saddle.

Founded around the time of the American Civil War, the Liberatores claim spiritual descent from slaves that Awakened and helped to organize the Underground Railroad. The Liberatores worked, and continue to work, to abolish institutionalized slavery worldwide, but their focus has broadened considerably over the past century. Their primary efforts are still directed against the black market trade in human beings, but this Legacy also actively sabotages any activity that smacks of economic oppression or social control through mental and emotional abuse or deprivation.

Nickname: "The New Masters" (used only by outsiders; the Liberatores themselves hate this term)

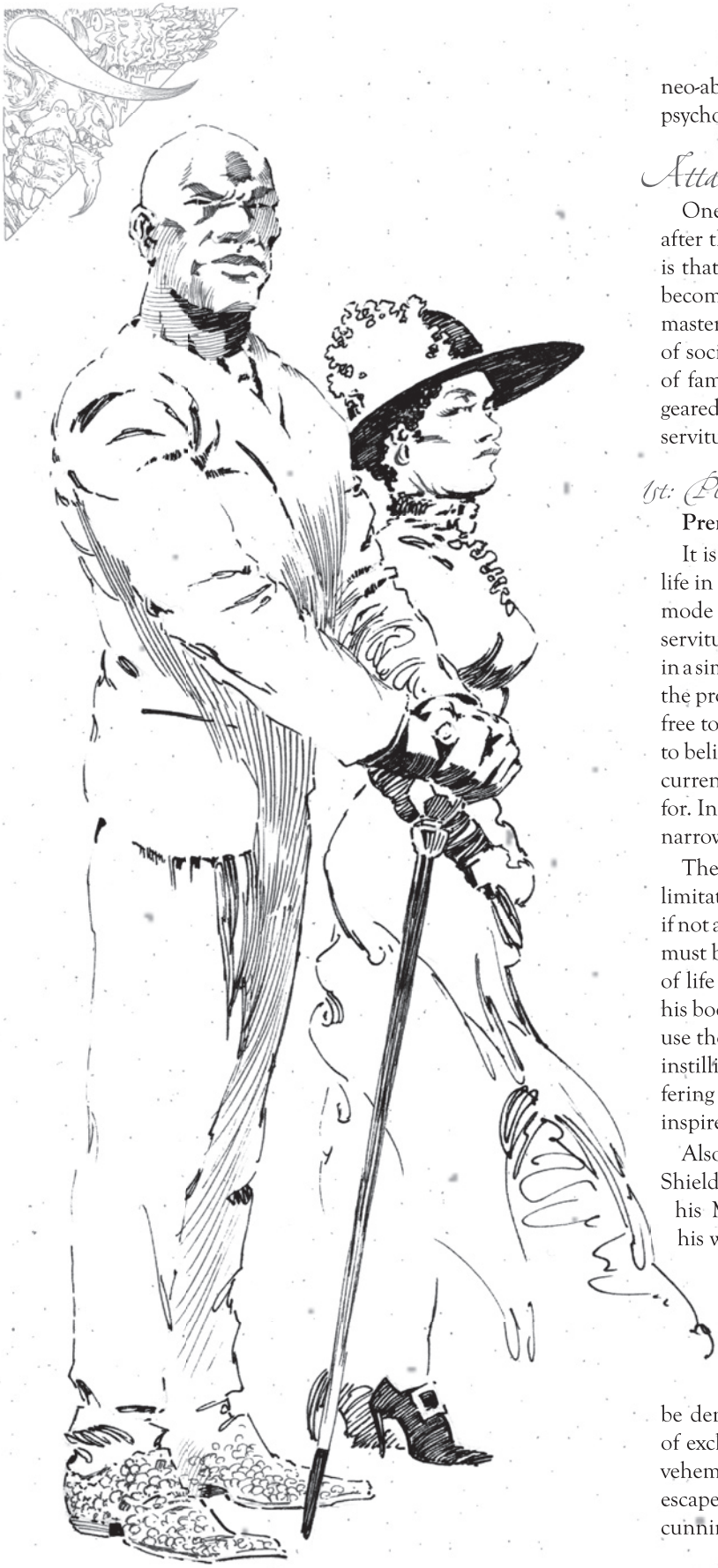
Appearance: While they frequently don the attire of wealth and privilege to pose as slave traders or buyers when conducting insurgent operations, Liberatores generally favor the garments of the lower classes to signify their rejection of elitist values. Scars and injuries inflicted by bosses, taskmasters or other authorities are proudly displayed as unquestionable signs of their affiliation with the oppressed, as are calluses and skin conditions denoting a lifetime of hard labor, not to mention outright deformities that show a family history of working with teratogens and other health-endangering substances or processes.

Background: Intensely classist in their prejudices, the Liberatores seldom induct pupils from the upper or middle classes unless the prospect has shown some overwhelming self-sacrificing devotion to the Legacy's principles. The majority of inheritors are former slaves of some sort or another, having Awakened after spending the first part of their lives in labor camps, forced prostitution or similar conditions. Needless to say, most come from abusive homes as well.

Character Creation: Virtues such as Charity, Hope and Justice are especially prized. Predominant Skills are usually a Craft of some sort, while Streetwise and Subterfuge are also common.

Organization: Secretive and close-knit, the Liberatores form self-contained cells like so many radically subversive fanatical groups. Cells usually have a specific local focus, whether an unethical business or institution, or some terminus in the black market network such as a campus or nightspot where young attractive people are abducted, a wilderness or ghetto stronghold where prisoners get reconditioned through torture and brainwashing, a hotel where captives are displayed and change hands while dirty money is laundered, a shipping company that moves "migrant workers" packed into steel cargo crates or a resort locale where the ultra-rich can privately enjoy the abject servitude of others.

Concepts: Undercover operative (specializing in role as slave, buyer, seller, pimp, prostitute, etc.), rescue commando,



neo-abolition lobbyist, underground railroad engineer, group psychotherapist

Attainments

One of the reasons that slavery-like conditions persist even after the social systems fostering them have been dismantled is that psychological patterns of dominance and submission become so thoroughly imprinted in the personalities of both master and slave. These patterns survive in the grand scale of socio-economic inequities and in the more intimate scale of family relationships. The Attainments of this Legacy are geared toward identifying and healing the psychic scars of servitude and abuse.

1st: Planting the Seed of Rebellion

Prerequisites: Gnosis 3, Mind 2

It is understandable that a person who has lived his entire life in a cage or bound in chains cannot conceive of any other mode of existence. Wage slaves and others who are kept in servitude by circumstance and overarching social systems exist in a similar state of being "brainwashed," although in such cases the process is more insidious. While they may theoretically be free to change jobs, even careers or lifestyles, they were raised to believe that their options are limited and that the lives they currently lead are the best possible situations that they can hope for. In both cases, their bondage is assured by their artificially narrowed understanding of the world around them.

The first duty of the Liberatore is to dispel this illusion of limitation, to lift the slave's mind out of a confinement that is, if not actually self-imposed, at least self-perpetuating. The slave must be aware of and yearn for a fundamentally different way of life or else carry his manacles with him forever even after his body has been freed from physical chains. The Liberatores use the Mind 2 spell "Emotional Urging" to accomplish this, instilling a wish for genuine freedom in the minds of those suffering from both overt and covert enslavement. The intent is to inspire the target with a hope for improving her lot in life.

Also, the mage has an indefinite-Duration Mind 2 "Mental Shield" that protects him (with a number of points equal to his Mind dots) from supernatural attempts to overcome his will.

Optional Arcanum: Spirit 2

Some Liberatores take a more generalized or external approach to this duty by calling upon a spirit to do the work of inspiring the oppressed. Of course, since the Liberatores are Mastigos, that spirit will be demonic in essence; demons have a long mythic history of exclusion, punishment and servitude — not to mention a vehement hatred of such conditions and a burning desire to escape them. A dedicated and motivated spirit will use its own cunning and powers to inspire the lust for freedom. Further-

more, if the target ever achieves that freedom, the spirit will likely be raised in rank among its peers, and may even gain some degree of permanent identity in the physical world as a symbol of liberation.

The Liberatore can use an effect similar to the Spirit 2 "Lesser Spirit Summons," although she can only call upon demonic spirits. To do so, she makes an instant Resolve + Intimidation + Spirit roll contested by the demon's Resistance. The Liberatore who summons such a spirit can also use other magic (such as the higher levels of Spirit spells) to command the spirit or bind it to a particular person, group or place. The contradiction of enslaving a spirit to do the work of freeing others will not be lost on the intelligent spirit, however, and so this tactic is to be avoided. Demons in particular are notorious for adhering to the letter of a command while subverting its intent. Yearning for liberation can very easily be transformed into violent rage against the slave drivers, an envious desire to enslave one's former masters or even a bitter hatred of one's fellow slaves.

2nd: Strengthening the Spine

Prerequisites: Gnosis 5, Mind 3

Instilling the desire for liberty is not enough to accomplish that desire. Clear thought is needed to skillfully manipulate one's situation, outbursts of indignant rage must be suppressed in order to prevent retaliatory punishment and an increase in security measures and courage is definitely needed when the moment comes for open rebellion.

The second Attainment employs the effect of the Mind 3 spell "Augment the Mind" to reinforce a Liberatore's resolve to endure whatever is necessary to gain the goal of liberation. When this Attainment is first gained, the mage must choose a single Mental or Social Attribute to boost. He cannot later choose a different Attribute. To boost this Attribute, he spends an instant action calling upon his passionate need for freedom; on the following turn (and for the remainder of the scene), he adds his Mind dots to the chosen Attribute. (If he casts a spell to boost this Attribute further, its default Duration is automatically transitory, regardless of its normal default Duration.)

Optional Arcanum: Spirit 3

The Liberatore can exorcise a possessing demon from its victim, with an effect similar to the Spirit 3 "Exorcism" spell. He performs an extended action rolling Resolve + Intimidation + Spirit contested by the demon's Power + Resistance.

3rd: Casting Off the Shackles

Prerequisites: Gnosis 7, Mind 4

As was pointed out under the first Attainment, the most debilitating, persistent and insidious effect of forced servitude is its degradation and diminishment of the human soul. Those who have spent all or most of their lives in captivity may be overwhelmed by the responsibility that accompanies freedom, and some former slaves actually feel that they were better off before they were liberated. (Some social psychologists recognize this in the phenomenon of the "institutionalized man," a term often applied to former convicts who violate parole and commit crimes so that they can trade back their ineptitude at participating in society at large for the comparative security and regularity of prison life.) Some are so deeply conditioned to a social structure of dominance and submission that they incapable of sustaining any relationships that are not inherently manipulative, exploitative or oppressive. For these freed ones, liberation is simply a matter of exchanging a new master for an old one, or else an opportunity to begin exercising power over others as was previously done to them.

To ensure that the freed can truly become and remain free, much of the efforts of the Liberatores are committed to deconditioning and deprogramming those they liberate. For this, the Mind 4 "Breach the Vault of Memory" effect can be most efficacious. The mage makes an instant Manipulation + Persuasion + Mind roll, contested by the target's Resolve + Composure. The mage can choose to suffer dice penalties on his roll to extend the effect's Duration, just as he would with an instant spellcasting. The Liberatore can repeatedly condition a target once the initial conditioning is about to expire, allowing him to extend the effect as long as he can keep up regular conditioning.

Masters of this Legacy are most likely to be found in fortresses and institutional compounds with heavy security — both to keep out the forces of corrupt oppressive authorities and to contain the freed slaves who would still present some danger to the world if they were released unconditionally. Extensive mind-altering techniques, from basic education to deep psychotherapy involving all sorts of mind-magic, are applied to heal psychic trauma and ultimately empower the traumatized. (Of course, to the unenlightened observer such a place might appear indistinguishable from the very slave camps or illegal prisons that its inhabitants were rescued from.)

Optional Arcanum: Spirit 4

The Liberatore gains the effects of the Spirit 3 "Numinous Shield" spell, its protection equal to his Spirit dots. This Attainment of indefinite Duration and cannot be dispelled. He can also grant similar protection to others with an instant Composure + Persuasion + Spirit roll. This affects a single target (unless he accepts dice penalties to increase the Target factors) and lasts for one scene.

Mastigos Characters

The All-Knowing Know-It-All

Quote: *What?! No. That's wrong. You're confused. How can you think that? Who says so? Where did you hear that? When was that*

written? Why would you even waste time reading that stuff? You've missed the point entirely. What you don't understand is . . .

Background: Usually either a rich kid or pretending to be one, the AKKIA must invariably claim some suitably impressive life story that will lend sufficient gravity to his or her pronouncements. Elaborately titled degrees from well-known academic institutions or even "secret" societies must be reinforced with initials after names, or else replaced with demonstrably credible autodidacticism, savant mental ability, an agreeably convincing demeanor, a world-weary excess of experience or a visibly contusive and laceratory diploma from the school of hard knocks.

Description: The trademark of the AKKIA's appearance is the gloating smug glare of intellectual superiority framed by permanently arched eyebrows, often accented by a sneering smile and upturned nose. Definitive understatement of fashion calculated to enhance or disguise passive-aggressive posturing while reinforcing role and status within the group.

Storytelling Hints: You see yourself as the Zen master whose staff is always ready to knock the skull of the student whose mind has strayed from the search for enlightenment. Others — who cannot admit their errors — see you as a hypercritical jerk. They just don't realize that your constant prodding is a necessary catalyst to their continued growth and evolution.

Abilities: Academics, Investigation, Persuasion

Fact-check (dice pool 8) — The mage has excellent recall and is highly erudite in many fields of empirical, verifiable knowledge—science, history, current and local affairs, etc. This roll enables him to bring to mind established data relevant to any question.

Withering Insult (dice pool 6) — Seldom given to physical conflict or even open confrontation, the mage nevertheless is capable of saying things so bitterly hurtful that the successes from this roll are subtracted from the next Social or Mental roll that the target makes.

The Thumb

Quote: *Oh, I wouldn't do that if I were you.*

Background: The Thumb is most likely to come from a background of law enforcement or military life, although many others are the product of diplomatic, academic or religious training. The common factor among all Thumbs is their strict adherence to — or at least a fascination with — a group identity expressed through a strong hierarchical power structure with a clearly defined chain of command. Most hold, or at one time held, positions of authority—police officers, soldiers, teachers, even priests — but generally are not overly ambitious, usually attaining some command status but seldom rising through administrative ranks or ever claiming full leadership of any large organization. As enforcers, Thumbs frequently have some combat training and/or experience and tend to be the physically toughest members of their group; there are exceptions, however, as some Thumbs are capable of upholding their duties using intellectual or interpersonal skills.

Description: The Thumb makes it her duty to act as the police officer of whatever group she finds herself in, upholding the collective standards of conduct whether she was officially accorded such a role or not. She is most comfortable in the role of intermediary between a group and its leadership, relaying orders from above and ensuring that they are obeyed as intended. What distinguishes the Thumb from the common lackey or brown-noser, however, is that her personal loyalty ultimately lies with the group rather than any individual leader. Thus the Thumb is often the key figure in determining the success or failure of mutinies, revolutions and other power struggles; if the Thumb can be convinced that her leader has neglected or betrayed the shared values and goals of the group, she will likely support the regime change. (The term "thumb" refers to the oldest student of an Asian martial arts school, charged with keeping the other students in line.)

Storytelling Hints: You know who's who and what's what, and make sure that everyone else does too. You need not be cruel or domineering, but will do whatever is necessary to maintain the integrity and direction of the group to which you belong. If you do not belong to a group, find one; if your group does not have a clear chain of command or integrated social structure, try to create one.

Abilities: Politics, Brawl, Intimidation

Barking Command (dice pool 8) — Like a practiced drill instructor, the mage is able to project her voice with such amplitude and intensity that the Storyteller may require a Willpower roll from any who do not wish to leap to comply with the order.

Bend Rules (dice pool 5) — While hardly a nitpicking attorney, the mage understands the intent of authority and regulation enough to know when and how to allow minor infractions that do not undermine leadership or disrupt group harmonics.

Minerva

Quote: *Do as I say.*

Background: Minerva is a dominatrix, but seldom uses the term. To most people, it conjures images of tall, slim women in tight leather outfits, barking orders and carrying whips. While Minerva is *capable* of that kind of behavior, she doesn't much enjoy it. She prefers to exert dominance through sensation, through tying down her lovers and overwhelming them with feelings of soft fabrics, hot metal, sharp needles and gentle caresses. "The skin," she often remarks, "is the largest organ of the body, so it's most efficient to use that rather than the genitals."

Minerva claims that her profession and her Awakening are entirely coincidental, and that her experience in Pandemonium in no way triggered any thoughts of sexual dominion.

In dominance play, she says, control actually rests with the submissive (since the dom isn't likely to stop unless asked). In Pandemonium, there are no safewords, no keys to the cuffs, no way to stop if things grow too intense. All one can do is have patience and try to endure — as she did.

She acts as a mentor to young Mastigos of all orders, teaching them to hone their abilities with the Arcanum of Mind and to most effectively and creatively use them on others. Minerva believes that the Warlocks are the most important of the Awakened, because the greatest threats to the world come not in the forms of slavering demons or wild spirits, but as tempters, liars and seducers. Those are the beings that a mage must beware of, and the mage must keep his head no matter how painful — or how pleasurable — circumstances become.

Description: Minerva is in her late 40s, but has a young face and clear, fair skin. Her hair is strawberry blonde and cut short. She typically dresses in loose cotton dresses, but will "dress the part" if she feels she needs to. She carries a heavy black case with her tools (a variety of fabrics, blades and other implements, although she includes a stun gun as well, in case things get out of hand). When not on the job, she wears a kind smile and speaks softly, but when engaged in dominance, whether for work or play, her voice becomes even and stern.

Her nimbus manifests to onlookers as a light, sensuous touch, as if an invisible hand lightly traces lines on parts of their body.

Storytelling Hints: Minerva grows weary of explaining what she does and why it benefits her Consilium and order. People think the strangest things when they are lost in sensation, and with the release of orgasm comes a desire to speak, to let people in. She works to teach mages not to allow this kind of advantage, but has also learned important information from her clients during sessions. Students who insult or belittle her are asked to leave her company and never return. She doesn't take offense easily, but she does insist upon manners.

Dedicated Magical Tool: A worn, leather scourge

Real Name: Mary Noonan

Path: Mastigos

Order: Silver Ladder

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (Erotica) 2, Computer 1, Crafts 2, Occult 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Firearms 2, Stealth 1, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Empathy (Body Language) 2, Expression* 1, Intimidation 2, Persuasion* 3, Socialize 2, Subterfuge* (Unspoken Desires) 3

Merits: Consilium Status 3, Contacts (Business, D&S Scene) 2, Dream 1, Order Status: Silver Ladder 2, Resources 2

Willpower: 6

Wisdom: 8

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Health: 8

Gnosis: 2

Arcana: Life 2, Mind 4, Space 2

Rotes: *Life* — Cleanse the Body (•), Body Control (••), Purify Bodies (••); *Mind* — One Mind, Two Thoughts (•), Emotional Urging (••), First Impressions (••), Telepathy (•••), Read the Depths (••••); *Space* — Finder (•), Ward (••)

Mana/per turn: 11/2

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Dice Pool
Knife	1(L)	1	5

Armor: 4 ("Misperception," Mind ••)





MOROS
Path of Doom

Kjell reached for his knife, slowly, trying to keep the motion unnoticed. The creature saw it, though, and raised a scolding finger.

"Stop it," the thing hissed. "You can't send me back there."

The mage opened his palms, showing the creature that he was unarmed. "You have no right to that body," he said calmly. "Leave now, and I won't have to cut you loose."

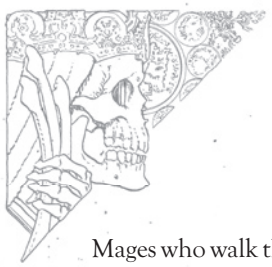
The thing smiled. Its teeth were rotting and loose, worn down by chewing bone. One of the thing's incisors fell from its mouth and bounced off its shoe. "I took this body. Its owner wasn't using it anymore."

"Because you killed him." The creature spat something in its own unclean language. Kjell mused that it sounded almost similar to the High Speech. "Go home. It's happening whether you like it or not, so don't make it hard on yourself."

With a wet snarl, the creature crouched and sprang. Kjell stood fast, knowing that he couldn't dodge the intruder's blow in such close quarters. The flesh on its fingers was worn away, exposing sharp bone. It raked down at Kjell's face, but the attack seemed to soften, to die, just before it connected.

Kjell drew his knife and dragged it along the creature's stomach, with barely enough force to cut the flesh. Even so, the creature started to scream. Kjell reversed his grip on the blade and shoved it under the intruder's throat.

"Out," he murmured. "Back where you came from. If I want you back here, I'll call for you."



"You can't take it with you."
— Popular saying

Mages who walk the Path of Doom aren't necessarily death-obsessed or even morose. They simply have a perspective on death that Sleepers, and indeed most other mages, don't. Everything ends, and while humans have some of the longer lifespans on the planet, they inevitably end. To the Moros, the time of expiration is less important than the method, and, of course, what the deceased did to the change the world during his brief stay among the living.

Theme

The Tarot card Death doesn't literally mean death (not in most decks, anyway). The usual interpretation of the card is transition, and the end of a life is certainly that, not just for the deceased, but for everyone who knew her. Moros mages, called "Necromancers" by the Awakened on other Paths, sometimes complain that the title doesn't really suit them (at least, not universally, though there are certainly many mages on the Path of Doom whom the appellation fits). Moros aren't necessarily interested in raising the dead to serve them or becoming rich by transmuting lead to gold. The important thing is that for one split second, the corpse is both inert matter and a moving servant, the block of metal is both worthless and priceless. At the moment of transition, the subject is both what it *was* and what it *will be* — and that is true of souls as well. At the moment of death, a person is both among the living and the dead, glimpsing what she is leaving behind and what she is approaching, but likely not seeing either too clearly. That moment is the Awakening for most Moros, though, and instead of looking back on their lives and reaching out to hold on (thus either returning to life or lingering on as ghosts) or looking ahead and embracing the Great Beyond (whatever that might entail; even the Moros are unsure), they dwell on that moment, that endless instant when life ends and death begins. That is the sort of person who becomes a Necromancer, the kind of person to whom transition (*not* "change," which is a different idea) is paramount.

Transition is not change. Change is chaos. The world is in a constant state of change, but on either such minute levels (molecular or cellular changes) or such grand scales (political or cultural shifts) that an individual cannot perceive them. The Moros are more interested in the precise moment of transition, and in such scales that is difficult to note. Let the Mastigos have their chaos, the Obrimos their boundless energy and the Acanthus their potential and destiny. The Moros would rather pick apart the moment of transition and explore the deeper meaning and implications of that moment.

Sacrifice is another strong thematic element on the Path of Doom. The Moros die for their power, suffering near-death experiences during their Awakenings. Mythology is replete with stories of individuals who died, suffered great pain or undertook journeys into the lands of the dead in order to accomplish a goal or gain knowledge. While these ordeals or journeys might take long periods of time, the moment that interests the Moros is the culmination, when the goal is accomplished or the knowledge gained. The *koans* of Eastern philosophy often bring enlightenment in a burst rather than a gradual understanding, and these moments, like the moment of death, come all too swiftly.

When understanding the Moros Path, consider the following image: A long, dirt road stretches from west to east. It meets a line in the dirt. Once a traveler steps over that line, the road continues on, but is paved with gold. That is the Moros Path — one very long journey (life as a Sleeper) followed by another (life as a mage) with only the most fleeting of moments separating them. That image holds true for most other transitional events that the Moros find important: life and death, marriage, love, parenting, entering or leaving one of the orders and any other circumstance so momentous that the mage's life is forever divided, in his perception of *before that* and *after that*.

Mood: Respect and Contemplation

"Unflappable" is good descriptor for many Moros. They are calm, almost eerily so, even while discussing or witnessing truly gruesome acts. Having experienced the moment of death, if not the aftermath, they are aware that pain and suffering are transitory, mere moments after which comes a long period of quiet. Moros, therefore, don't tend to be fearful or easily shocked.

Chaos, however, disturbs the Moros. Too many things all changing at once gives them too much to focus upon, and not enough time to study a given transition before it changes again. Therefore, the Path of Doom is silent and almost barren, providing little in the way of distraction.

Sadness or depression isn't terribly common among the Necromancers. Depression kills energy and ambition, and makes for a long, slow slide into nothingness. While a transition certainly exists at the end of that journey, it isn't something most Moros are interested in experiencing. Despite the Path's emphasis on death, Moros mages don't tend to dwell on the negative aspects of life's end. That doesn't mean they mock death, of course. The Moros are highly respectful of both death and the bereaved, though they do believe that mourning shouldn't go on any longer than truly necessary. Many cultures have a specific length of time in which normal mourning takes place, and individual Moros often observe this. In the absence

of a cultural reference, three days is a good rule of thumb. If, three days after a friend, loved one or even enemy's death, the mage is not prepared to return to her normal life, clearly there is some aspect of the deceased's influence on her own life that she hasn't recognized and dealt with.

Rather than sadness, then, respect and contemplation are more appropriate to the overall mood of the Path. Necromancers can easily fall to the Vice of Pride — being able to force the bodies and souls of the dead into service is a power with the potential for horrible abuse. Moros mentors, then, often try to instill a sense of respect (if not humility) into their pupils. A corpse might just be dead matter, a ghost might simply be the tattered remains of a person, but both of these things were once vibrant, living creatures, and their fate is no different from the mage's, but for the details.

The History of the Longest Road

Texts and murals discovered in ancient Atlantean temples tell fascinating stories of the Path of Doom, beginning after the creation (or discovery) of the Watchtower of the Lead Coin. While this "history" is all very interesting, of course, many Moros are more concerned with how the Path has grown and changed in recent history, and how their teachings have filtered into Sleepers' science and beliefs.

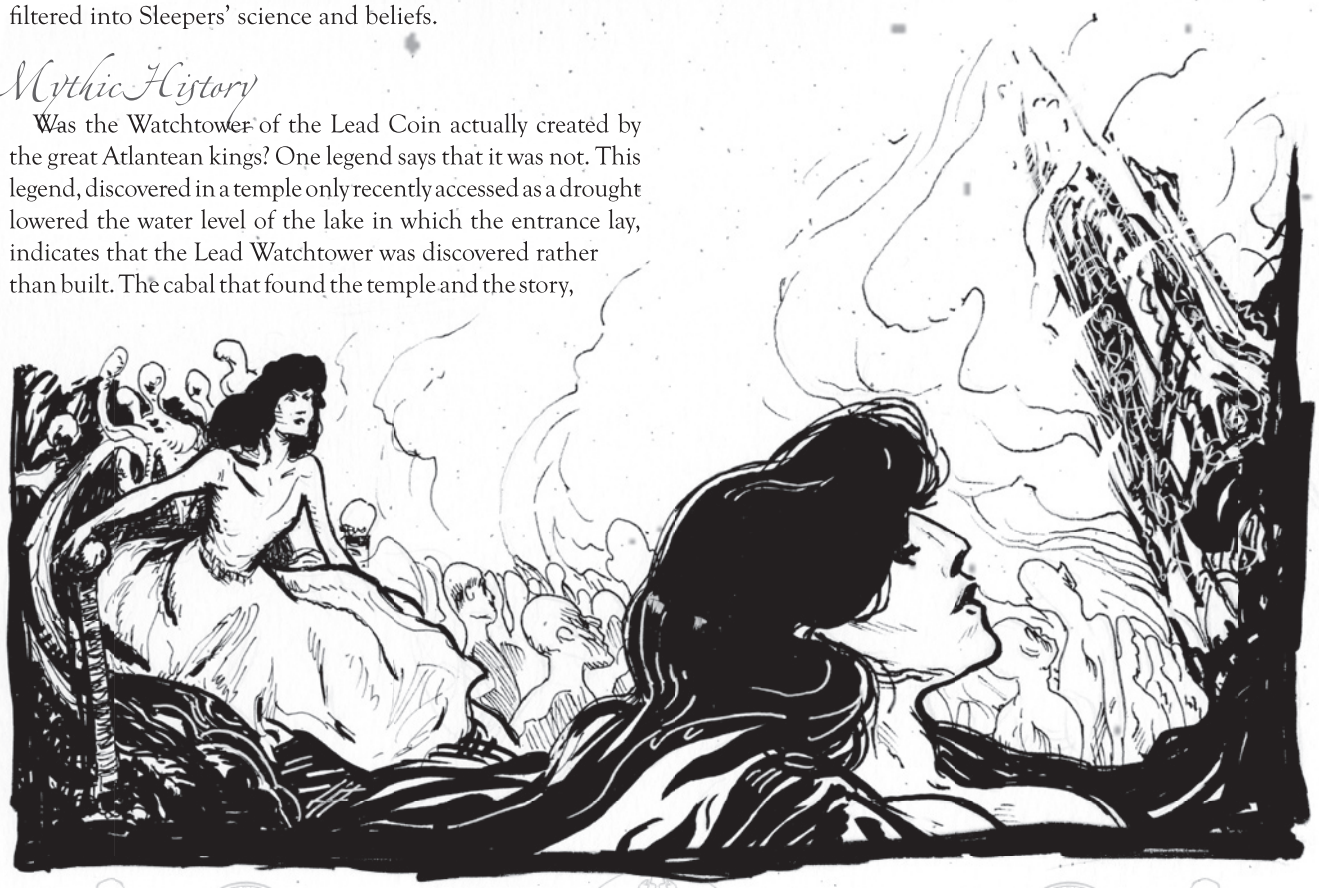
Mythic History

Was the Watchtower of the Lead Coin actually created by the great Atlantean kings? One legend says that it was not. This legend, discovered in a temple only recently accessed as a drought lowered the water level of the lake in which the entrance lay, indicates that the Lead Watchtower was discovered rather than built. The cabal that found the temple and the story, of course, was not able to translate it perfectly, as no living mage has a fluent understanding of the High Speech, but the beautiful gilded drawings in the book helped them piece together the tale.

Behold the Leaden Tower

The Oracles broke off their battles with the Exarchs and fled into the Supernal Realms, knowing that, unless they could find a way to bridge the Abyss and call other souls to the higher planes, magic would slowly die out. The Oracle who would become the Oracle of the Moros entered the Realm of Stygia, the Abode of Shades, and walked the paths strewn with gold and silver, moving quietly among the waiting souls.

The Oracle knew the task before her. She needed a way to allow the souls of mages in the Fallen World to visit Stygia, to forge a sympathetic connection to the Realm and use the power therein in their own world. But how? How could one forge a connection with a realm meant only for the dead? Dying alone wouldn't allow it, although to reach Stygia, death would be necessary. But something more was needed, a way to allow the mage to sidestep death, to find a third option besides moving on to the Great Beyond or returning to the mortal coil. Awakening was that option — but death was pervasive. A mage had to retain control of his soul. The Oracle called up a throne of opal and sat down, quiet and somber, thinking on the problem.



As she thought, she noted that when new souls arrived in Stygia to await their time to move on, they would glance upwards as though paying respect to something. Curious, she looked in the same direction, but saw nothing except the black Stygian sky. She reached out to the Shades nearby and asked them what they saw when they arrived, but their answer didn't make sense. When asked, they all responded, "Behold, the Leaden Tower."

The Oracle stared, and used every spell she knew searching for this Tower, but could not see it. She asked the Shades where it was, but none of them could answer. The Tower was basic to them, she decided, as breathing to a living person, and they could not explain what it was or how to reach it. The Oracle wandered the Realm of Stygia searching for the Leaden Tower, but no matter where she went, the Shades always seemed to be looking at something distant, yet comforting. They always said the same thing when asked — "Behold, the Leaden Tower."

At long last, the Oracle knew what she needed to do to see the Tower. She called up the powers of Death, and bade them consume her body. She cut her soul loose, watched as her mortal shell crumbled away and all around her saw the quiet, pale beauty of Stygia. And there, in the distance, a beacon of hope for the Fallen World, she saw the Watchtower of the Lead Coin. "Behold," she whispered, "the Leaden Tower."

This story implies, of course, that the Oracle of the Moros actually had to die and give up her mortal body entirely in order to allow Sleepers to Awaken on the Moros Path. Another story, though, told through a mural embellished with glyphs discovered in a deep cave, seems to indicate otherwise, as that story refers to the construction of the Watchtower in Stygia (though only peripherally to the main story). Interestingly, the Oracle in this latter story is male, at least as far as the cabal that found it has been able to translate.

The Intruder War

From the Lower Depths they came, some walking on two legs like humans, some scuttling along the ground like insects and some flying through the air in perverse mockery of the great Dragons of Old. They were creatures of hunger, of cold and lonely yearning, for to call them "evil" would be to grant them too much humanity. They did not understand humankind, and they did not intend to try. They wanted only warmth, and the souls of humanity were the fuel for their fires.

Who called them? Did they see the glow of the Fallen World even from their loathsome homes? Did the Awakened cut off from the Supernal in the wake of the collapse of the Celestial Ladder simply reach out to whatever was listening? Did the Exarchs call these creatures to hunt down and consume their enemies? The Oracles did not know. They were looking on in horror from the Supernal, far enough from the intruders to be safe but too far to help their pupils, their friends and children. The Oracles watched in revulsion as the intruders squirmed into the bodies of the dead, animating the limbs and lighting the eyes once more. The Oracles watched as these stolen corpses strangled the living, tore them apart, bit into their soft skin and drank of their blood, pierced their own unfeeling flesh with metal and wood. The Oracles watched as these monsters called upon powers born of the Lower Depths and raised up the bodies of their victims as soldiers. And four of the Oracles turned to Stygia, for they knew that when the dead returned to bedevil the living, the Abode of Shades was their best hope.

The Oracle sat atop his Watchtower and looked long into the Fallen World. He saw the intruders killing and maiming the living and calling up their bodies just as he himself had sometimes done when he needed servants. He called up the Shades of Stygia and built his Watchtower higher, wider, and drew upon the power of the Realm to reach across the Abyss.

He knew that he could not wield enough power to destroy the intruders from Stygia. They did not have souls of a kind that he could sever or deplete, and the process by which they latched onto the bodies of the dead was not one that he could interrupt. But the armies of the undead that they created were another matter. The power animating these lesser creatures worked on the same principles that he used, the same laws that he enforced in Stygia. He reached down and turned these creatures against their masters.

He found, however, that he could not destroy them, only rend their bodies and expel their twisted spirits back to the Lower Depths. He sent the bodies of the dead shambling after them, as the souls that had once inhabited those bodies looked on from Stygia. The walking corpses followed the intruders to the edges of the world, and there tore the flesh from their bones and built a gate. The Gate of Bones could not hold back all of the intruders, for some are clever enough to slip through, and some are invited by foolish mages or careless mortals. But the Gate still stands even today, and should it ever fall, the dead will rise once more in service to the intruders.

One final legend that doesn't mention the Oracle at all concerns an Atlantean temple that supposedly still exists somewhere. The story doesn't describe the Watchtower, but does point to the role of the Moros in ages past; they were smiths and magical craftsmen as much as necromancers.

The Mill of Plenty

A cadre of mages in service to the Exarchs found a cabal of refugees from Atlantis, but could not destroy them. Their sanctum was too well-fortified, connected as it was to an ancient Atlantean temple, and their magic kept them alive even without food or water. These minions, however, realized that without the tass that welled up from the river nearby, the water washing the Mana from the various Hallows along the river's bends, the spells that this cabal used to sustain themselves would fail. And so they dammed the river, rerouting the water to a reservoir that they could use, and waited for the mages to surrender.

One of the mages, however, was called the Craftsman, a walker on the Path of Doom but a master of both Matter and Prime. He had sensed what the Exarchs' minions were doing long before they finished their task, and he began an undertaking of his own. With the help of his cabal, he constructed a great mill out of gold and thaumium that would distill Mana from the earth and rock around it. This machine created food, water and even air for anyone living in the temple, sustained the temple's guardians and even allowed the cabal to cast the most complex of spells without fear of retribution from the Abyss. Confident that they could now outlast their attackers, the cabal waited.

Over time, however, it became clear that the Mill of Plenty was imperfect. Even the Craftsman was not capable of making a machine that never felt the weight of years. The gears ground, the pistons misfired, the pulleys and weights shifted slightly. The machine still ran, true, and still pulled Mana from the earth, but the Mana the machine distilled was weak and corrupt. The mages ate and drank of what it produced, but felt their strength leaving them. The Craftsman refused to admit, though, that his machine was to blame. Instead, he decided that the minions of the Exarchs must have found a way to damage the machine from afar, and led his cabal on a raid to kill them. Only one mage, the Craftsman's apprentice, stayed behind to tend to the temple.

When the mages left, though, they found that their enemies were long dead. The mages had outlasted those who attempted to outlast them, and they returned in triumph to their temple. Upon entering, though, the temple guardians, now half mad from the machine's faults, attacked them. Weakened by the poisoned Mana the machine had been putting out, the mages fell, their bodies absorbed into the earth and churned up by the machine.

The mill still exists and still runs. The apprentice is long dead, but his bones and soul wait near the machine's controls for someone who can fix it. If the river were ever unleashed, the flood of Mana into the nearby lands might help the machine to fix itself (for the Craftsman certainly implanted such spells), but such a thing might not even be possible anymore.

The temple guardians, though, have forgotten the signals and keys that allowed mages safe passage into the depths of the sanctum. Worse, creatures from the Abyss have slithered up through the cracks in the stone of the temple, and wait hungrily for Awakened investigators. The temple, barring the intervention of some truly exceptional mages, is lost, another tale of glory long past.

According to the mages who found this story, there was once a compass that would lead to this temple, but because of the slow mechanical failure in the temple, this compass is unreliable now. Still, the mage who finds this temple might well be able to fix the machine and draw nearly unlimited power from it, provided he could survive the guardians.

Contemporary History

The Paths aren't organized groups, and, therefore, discussing the "history" of the Moros Path, outside of a mythic context, is difficult. Certainly, some advances and trends among Sleepers resonate better with the Path of Doom than others. Following are a few of these trends and the ways in which the Moros view and use them.

War and Mass Destruction

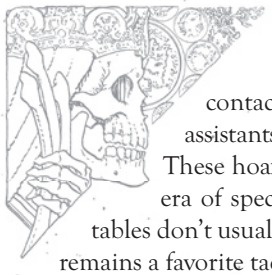
Over the centuries of recorded history, human beings have met on the field of battle and left millions of their fellows bleeding, burned and dead. Battlefield practices have always interested the Moros, even those who don't take direct roles in wars. In olden times, mercy killers would walk among the wounded, putting those who couldn't be saved out of their misery. More than one of the people tasked with this unpleasant job Awakened to the Path of Doom. Likewise, the design of new and more powerful weaponry was and remains a calling that might enlighten a Sleeper to the Moros Path.

War, however, is a notion that has changed as the population increases and the race for more devastating weaponry continues. While centuries past certainly saw massacres and disasters that cost many lives over the space of a short time, the 20th century introduced devices and sciences that put such catastrophes as Béziers, Pompeii and Jerusalem to shame. The atom bombs snuffed so many thousands of lives in a heartbeat that the very notion of what death *meant* changed. No longer was killing thousands of people a matter of stabbing, shooting or even poisoning, all of which at least left corpses to be disposed of and survivors to be picked off. The atom bombs disintegrated people, leaving only shadows behind, and the significance of this wasn't lost on the Moros. Some Necromancers felt that, when the A-bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Stygia as a Realm would lose power since death was losing much of its meaning. Other Moros argued that the atom bomb's power only reaffirmed what the Necromancers had been saying all along — the body was just matter, and the soul was eternal. Both sides argued what the effect of a full-scale nuclear war would be on Stygia, but, of course, these discussions have heretofore been academic.

Spiritualism

The notion that some people can commune with the dead has been around for millennia. Priests, shamans and other spiritual figures help the bereaved make sure that the souls of the departed reach whatever afterlife the culture feels appropriate, and interpret the desires of the dead should they deign to contact the living. Some of these "mediums" actually have the gifts they claim, and many of them have walked the Path of Doom. The charlatan medium, however, has also been around for centuries.

Spiritualism grew in popularity in the West near the turn of the 20th century, and experienced a resurgence in the late 1990s. Mediums once held table readings, promising to



contact deceased loved ones and using lights, assistants and other trickery to fool their customers. These hoaxes were easily debunked, and in today's era of special effects, flashing lights and knocking tables don't usually fool anyone. "Cold reading," however, remains a favorite tactic. This technique consists of throwing out general questions and letting the mark answer them, while making him think that the psychic is the one coming up with the details. The Moros have watched this practice in disgust for centuries, not just because it fleeces people at their most vulnerable but also because it ultimately leads to disbelief in ghosts. While not all Necromancers are of the same mind on the topic, many of them want Sleepers to recognize that the spirits of the dead linger. If they do so, in theory they should be more open to the laws of Stygia and thus the gulf between the Kingdom of Crypts and the Fallen World will narrow. Every "celebrity psychic," however, who shams people into believing that she is talking to their dead relatives, ultimately weakens that connection. Indeed, some Moros claim that the Seers of the Throne can be found pulling the strings of these parasites. What most Moros don't know, and those who do won't usually admit, is that the Guardians of the Veil sometimes use such people for the Guardians' own inscrutable ends.

Changes in Matter

Sleepers might not have figured out how to turn lead into gold, but science over the years has developed thousands of other processes of changing the properties of matter in useful ways. The processes of vulcanization of rubber, galvanization of steel, preparation of phosphorous for safe use and many other discoveries in cultures the world over showed the Moros that Sleepers were quite capable their own alchemy. Advances in these fields continue in modern times — materials such as Kevlar, Teflon and even Velcro came from the minds of Sleepers, not the magical workings of the Awakened.

The Moros look upon these kinds of innovations as "Sleeper alchemy," and the Moros use the term, for the most part, without a hint of irony or condescension. Innovation is not restricted to the inheritors of the Supernal. Indeed, some Moros feel that Sleeper scientists have the advantage of working entirely within the Fallen World, and thus they don't get frustrated by Paradoxes or tied up in Awakened politics. They are free to develop processes that work according to the Fallen World's precepts and, therefore, are useful to humanity at large. Magic can change matter more quickly and dramatically than Sleeper science, but magic doesn't tend to have widespread utility. The archetypal alchemical process is actually useless unless someone is buying gold. Some Necromancers look at the advances that science has made, compare them to what a single Moros can do, and simply mutter, "Lead into gold, but so what?"

Some Moros are more hopeful, however, stating that any accepted and workable process that allows transmutation, however subtle, increases sympathy with Stygia. Others feel that all of the innovations made in various metallurgical and chemical sciences actually hinder this sympathy because they reduce transmutation to long, expensive and protracted processes. In fact, these Moros say, concentration and perhaps a phrase in the High Speech should be all that is necessary to change matter as one sees fit.

Thesis

This section contains information about the Realm of Stygia and its magical laws, as well as the symbols and correspondences of the Moros Path visible even to Sleepers.

Stygia

Every Moros experiences Stygia differently, but one thing they agree on is that it is calm. "Peaceful" isn't quite the right word, because that would imply a kind of benign ambiance that isn't present. "Serene," though, is closer to the truth. Stygia is a place of waiting, of contemplation before moving on to whatever comes after death. Stygia is the Kingdom of Crypts, and indeed, many people Awakening as Moros report seeing tombstones, mausoleums and other such burial chambers while in the Realm.

Stygia is inhabited by the souls of human beings, but these souls are not ghosts. Ghosts, the insubstantial voyeurs that haunt the Twilight of the Fallen World, seldom know what they are or even that they are dead. They follow specific passions and agendas, never leaving the side of their anchors, until the ghosts are destroyed, freed or manage to pass on. The souls in Stygia, however, are fully aware of what and where they are. They are simply waiting until the right time to pass on. What constitutes the "right time"? Moros have asked the Shades of Stygia that question during Awakenings, and never receive the same answer. The Shades aren't being evasive, though, or so the Moros feel. As living people, no matter how enlightened, they lack the frame of reference necessary to understand the answer to that question.

Most Moros report that the ground in Stygia is made of white stone, though some claim to have seen nuggets or veins of gold or silver as well. Indeed, physical riches are commonplace in Stygia. Likewise, the bodies of the dead might rise up from the crypts and graves surrounding the mage to assist her, though some Awakenings might be lonely and starkly uninhabited. These zombies do not exhibit anything in the way of personality or agenda — they are simply matter, no more than automatons. In Stygia, matter is a tool, whatever matter is commanded to do.

Light in Stygia comes from torches placed on the crypts. Most "natural" light in Stygia is a wan sunlight that never fully breaks the omnipresent clouds, although some Awakening Moros report seeing natural rock formations that shine with

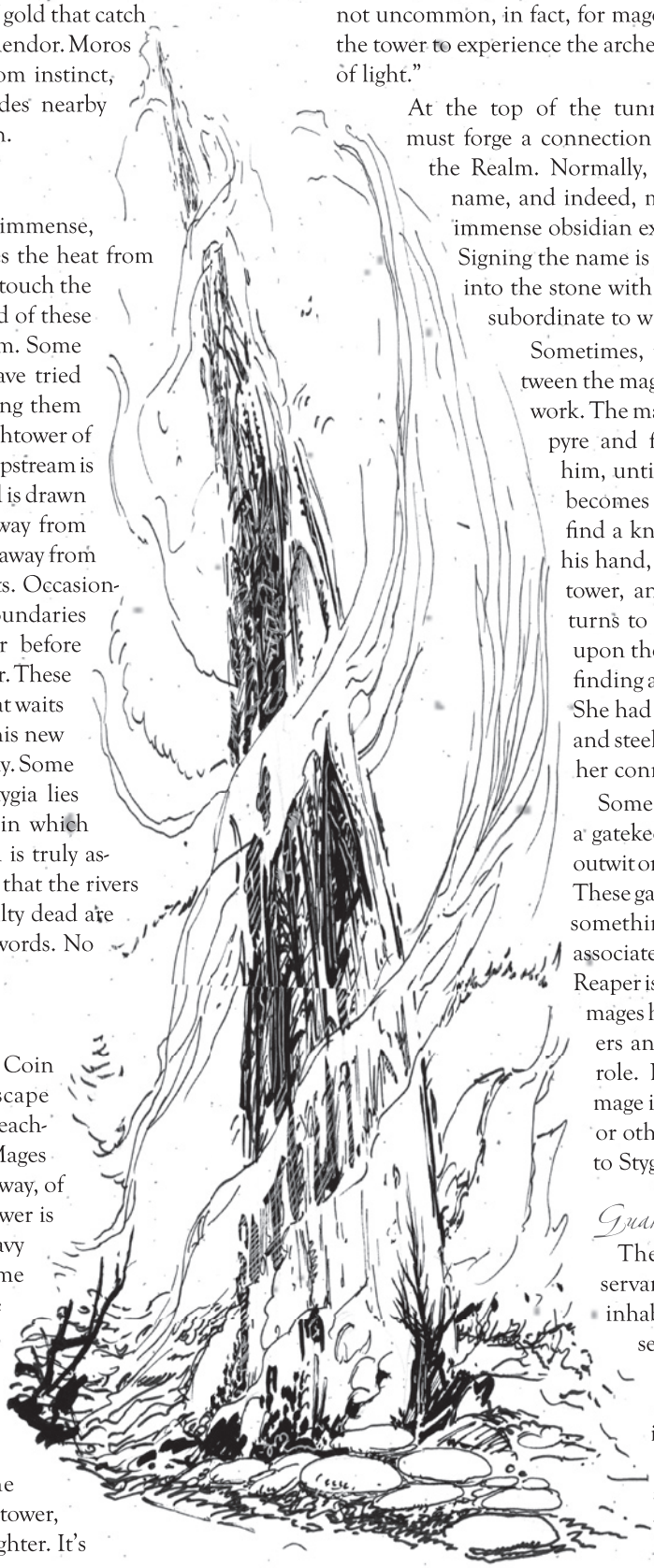
their own inner light or veins of gold that catch the torchlight in breathtaking splendor. Moros mages find that sight comes from instinct, from sensing objects and Shades nearby rather than from physical vision.

Rivers of Death

Rivers run through Stygia — immense, black rivers whose water leaches the heat from any living creature that dares to touch the water. The Shades seem terrified of these rivers and refuse to go near them. Some Moros on their Awakenings have tried to follow the rivers, but following them "downstream" leads to the Watchtower of the Lead Coin. Following them upstream is difficult, because the mage's soul is drawn to the tower. The rivers lead away from the pale light of the torches and away from any evidence of Shades or crypts. Occasionally, people Awaken on the boundaries of Stygia, and glimpse upriver before continuing on to the Watchtower. These mages know, somehow, that what waits nearby is not Stygia, but what this new Realm could be they could not say. Some Moros surmise that beyond Stygia lies another Supernal Realm, one in which Matter has no place and Death is truly ascendant. Other Moros theorize that the rivers lead to a place in which the guilty dead are tormented — to Hell, in other words. No one knows for certain, though.

The Watchtower

The Watchtower of the Lead Coin looms from the bleak landscape of Stygia, a mammoth spire reaching up to the gray clouds. Mages don't all see the tower the same way, of course. Some report that the tower is made of lead or some other heavy metal (gold, according to some reports). Some claim that the tower is not so much a tower as an immense pile of bones, so densely packed as to allow the mage to climb it. White marble or black glass has also been reported. Whatever the truth, as the mage ascends the tower, the light from the sky grows brighter. It's not uncommon, in fact, for mages climbing the tower to experience the archetypal "tunnel of light."



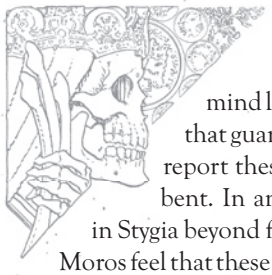
At the top of the tunnel, the Moros must forge a connection between his soul and the Realm. Normally, this involves signing his name, and indeed, many Moros recall seeing an immense obsidian expanse, covered with names. Signing the name is merely a matter of etching it into the stone with one's finger, since matter is subordinate to will in Stygia.

Sometimes, though, the connection between the mage and Stygia takes a bit more work. The mage might lie down on a great pyre and feel flame blaze up around him, until his soul turned to ash and becomes part of the Realm. He might find a knife or a sharp stone and cut his hand, offering up his blood to the tower, and then watch as the blood turns to carved amber or gold coins upon the floor. One Moros reported finding a forge in the top of the tower. She had to fashion a blade from lead and steel, which she then left there as her connection to the Realm.

Some mages are confronted with a gatekeeper, which they must best, outwit or simply order out of their way. These gatekeepers normally resemble something or someone commonly associated with death — the Grim Reaper is an obvious choice, but other mages have reported cats, executioners and even dead relatives in the role. Beyond the gatekeeper, the mage is permitted to sign her name or otherwise form her connection to Stygia.

Guardians

The Shades and the corpse servants aren't the only creatures inhabiting Stygia. Mages report seeing creatures darting behind hills and crypts, following the mages as though hunting. No living mage knows exactly what these creatures are. Some mages report that these creatures are vaguely canine in shape, calling to



mind legends of Cerberus, the three-headed dog that guarded the Greek underworld. Other mages report these creatures as humanoid, but short and bent. In any case, they do not interact with mages in Stygia beyond following them and watching them. Most Moros feel that these creatures guard the Supernal Realm from intruders from the Abyss or possibly from other Realms, but some mages feel that these creatures *are* Abyssal spirits, trapped in Stygia somehow.

Laws of Stygia

The Ruling Arcana of Stygia are, of course, Death and Matter. What this means within the Realm is that all matter is subordinate to the will of the Awakened. This reinforces one of the most fundamental truths of the Moros Path: riches, physical health and fitness and even magical power to a large degree all disappear when the mage's thread of life is finally cut. Death is the great equalizer, and thus matter is simple, easily reshaped or changed as necessary.

Death is a bit more complex, since it encompasses more diverse concepts than Matter does. As an Arcanum, Death can summon shadows, raise corpses and even slay magic. What a Moros is doing when casting a Death spell, though, is calling down the laws of Stygia and imposing them upon the Fallen World, and in Stygia, death touches everything. The Realm is a tapestry of endings. Shadows end light, corpses are the remains of living humans (and when the soul is gone, all that remains is matter, which is another reason that corpse-animation falls under Stygia's rule) and magic seldom survives the death of the caster.

The simplest connection between Matter and Death is the notion of the body as the seat of the soul. The body is simple matter, crude and unimportant, but it gives the soul somewhere to dwell during its time on Earth. The body dies, as all matter decays, and the soul flies free to whatever awaits it in the Great Beyond.

Some mages theorize that Stygia has only become home to so many souls since the fall of Atlantis. These mages postulate that, in ages past, souls passed through Stygia on their way to the next life (or to Heaven or Hell, or whatever else might await the dead — mages must admit that they do not know, and the dead can't seem to tell them), but only those souls with lingering fears or doubts about themselves remain in Stygia. They were more self-aware than ghosts, since ghosts remain in the Fallen World linked to other people or objects. The Shades' fears and doubts didn't involve the life they left behind, but their own souls and the impurities (perceived or real) within. Stygia, then, takes up a purgatorial role, allowing souls to linger there until they are ready or able to move on. Some Moros worry that this is what has contributed to the notion of the Death Arcanum leading to gruesome and manipulative applications; the Arcanum itself stagnates along with the Realm. Other Necromancers scoff at this, saying that the art of Death has always disturbed the living and will always do so, as long as people cannot see past the matter that houses their souls.

The Inferior Arcanum: Spirit

In the Primal Wild — indeed, in the Shadow Realm of the Fallen World — everything has a spirit. Clothing, animals, cars, tools and every other object that people think of as "inanimate" is actually home to a spiritual correspondence.

In Stygia, this is not the case. The only beings in Stygia with *any* kind of awareness are the Shades and anyone undergoing an Awakening at that given time. The land and the crypts do not boast their own spiritual analogs. Matter is nothing more than matter, flesh nothing more than flesh. This is very much in keeping with the laws of the Realm — that is, without a spirit to empower the flesh, it is nothing, unimportant. Flesh is simply a home for the soul, and human beings are special insomuch as their bodies *contain* souls.

The notion that everything has a spirit, that even the most basic tool has some kind of awareness within it, is one of the biggest hurdles a Moros can overcome. Most of them do, of course — knowledge of Spirit is highly useful for exorcists in particular, and the fact is that spirits are an objective part of even the Fallen World. Seeing spirits as intelligent entities takes some getting used to for the Moros, though. That is, when a Thyrsus mage claims to have "awakened the spirit" of a car or a gun, the neophyte Moros feels that the Shaman has done much the same thing as the Necromancer might when "awakening" a corpse. The Shaman has granted the tool a semblance of awareness, power and will, but all of this is really taken from the mage herself.

Eventually, the Moros will come to understand that while a corpse does not have a spirit (the corpse did, when it was alive), inanimate objects do. Stygia, however, has no power over such beings.

Correspondences

The Moros Path lends itself to certain sets of symbols and archetypes. Time spent in Stygia during the Awakening often calls these to mind, and a mage returns from her spiritual sojourn with preferences for objects, materials and even scents that call to mind her time in the Kingdom of Crypts. Such symbology might help a mage choose a shadow name (see sidebar) or help cabal members choose heraldry to represent their cabal.

For instance, yew or ash trees, as well as mistletoe, all have mythological significance with regards to death, and thus a cabal's symbol might include one of these plants if the membership boasts Necromancers. Diamonds, the perfected form of the element of Earth, are also common symbolic images for the Moros, and indeed, powerful Moros sometimes use

diamonds as loose currency among themselves. (Diamonds are lighter than gold, after all, and not much more complicated to create magically).

Names of Death

Every culture on Earth has personified death in some way, from the dour gods of various underworlds to the modern culture's Grim Reaper. Presented here is a short list of death gods and goddesses. Moros who place emphasis on their Paths and on the necromantic or thanatotic aspects of their Awakenings often take such names.

Ah Puch: Mayan god of death and ruler of the lowest of the nine Hells.

Balor: An Irish god of death and king of the giant Formorians.

Ghede: Voodoo god of death and wisdom, usually depicted standing at a crossroads. **Baron Samedi** is a similar, more modern, figure.

Hel: Norse goddess of death and ruler of the underworld, often described as half-alive and half-dead.

Kala: Balinese and Javanese god of death and time, as well as wealth. Sometimes loaned money to young men, but always appeared to collect and punished defaulters.

Nergal: Babylonian god of death and disease.

Orpheus: Greek musician who entered the Underworld to find his lost bride (and failed).

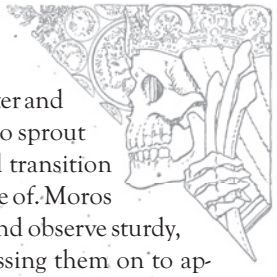
Merau: Polynesian goddess of death.

Persephone: Greek goddess and daughter of Zeus and Demeter who was carried away by Hades, ruler of the Underworld. Forced to remain in the Underworld for half of the year.

Vanth: Etruscan demon and herald of death.

Yama: Brahmin god of death and judge of the dead.

Earth, in fact, is the chief elemental correspondence for the Moros. This, in turn, means that pentacles tend to be common magical tools (since they, too, represent the element of Earth), and that other, similarly terrestrial symbols are common among the Necromancers. Vegetable gardening is a common Moros pastime, especially among those mages who study Life as well as their Ruling Arcana. Everything comes from the earth, the Moros remind their apprentices, and to the earth everything will one day return. Bringing forth matter and watching it change form — from seed to sprout to plant to food — is an evolution and transition that any Necromancer should take note of. Moros with more patience sometimes plant and observe sturdy, long-lived trees such as yews, even passing them on to apprentices when their time on Earth is through.

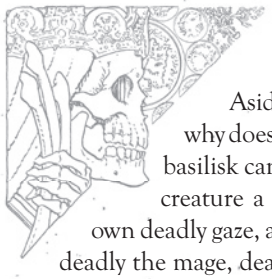


Magical correspondences can also help a Moros understand magical principles. The moth, for example, is a symbol of change and transformation as well as temptation and danger (being drawn to flame). A Moros studying the Arcanum of Forces or Life might look to the moth as a guiding principle when learning spells such as Matter 3 + Life 3 "Verminous Metamorphosis" or similar workings.

Likewise, when designing magical tools, these archetypes can be useful. Any member of the Adamantine Arrow can dedicate any weapon as a magical tool, but the most common one found among Moros members of the order is a hammer. The fact that the hammer can be used to construct or destroy is a significant notion to the Moros, as their ruling Arcana are much the same. Bladed weapons such as scythes and sickles are not terribly common among the Moros, despite these weapons' obvious connection to death. For one thing, they are impractical to carry in modern times, but more importantly, while a sickle or scythe is useful in farming, such a tool is only useful during one stage — the harvest. The Moros Path and the Arcanum of Death encompass much more than the single moment in which life becomes forfeit, and so a weapon needs much broader functionality than killing to be of note to the Moros. The hammer, then, sums this up nicely.

The colors of Stygia are muted, and, indeed, most Moros feel most comfortable wearing gray. The sky in the Kingdom of Crypts is perpetually overcast, but more than that, the "color" gray is neutral, in between black and white, which makes gray a perfect metaphor for the Moros Path. As with the hammer, functional either in creation or destruction, the color gray sits between two extremes, much as the Necromancers themselves.

Not everything in the Moros' symbolic correspondence is so benign or balanced, however. The basilisk is a mythological serpent that brings death wherever the creature goes. Its body is poison, to the point that a man on horseback who tried to spear a basilisk would not only wind up killing himself but his horse as well, as the venom was carried through his weapon. In heraldry, the basilisk resembles a rooster with bat wings and a long, serpent-like tail. The basilisk's very glance was deadly to most creatures, save the weasel, which was immune to its bite and one of the few beasts capable of killing it. The Moros see metaphorical "weasels" in other supernatural beings, such as werewolves and vampires. Just as the basilisk is undone if unable to use its venom, a mage without magic is just as soft and frail as any mortal.



Aside from the obvious connection with death, why does the basilisk resonate with the Moros? The basilisk can be killed, so legend says, by showing the creature a mirror. A basilisk is not immune to its own deadly gaze, and therein lies the lesson: no matter how deadly the mage, death will eventually come for him.

Glimpses of a Higher World

Blinded by Quiescence, Sleepers don't understand the Supernal World or the truth of what magic is. When they do see it, Disbelief sets in quickly. And yet, pathways to Stygia and symbolic references to it exist in many places throughout the Fallen World, and Sleepers see these references daily. And, sometimes, Sleepers feel the cool breeze of the Kingdom of Crypts or hear the whispers of the Shades. Typically, this sends Sleepers hurrying on to their next engagement, but such a revelation might also be the beginning of an Awakening.

Funeral Practices

The practices of preparing and burying the dead are some of the oldest and, in many cases, most elaborate of human customs. From setting a body on a floating pyre to entombing great kings with their mummified servants, no ancient culture believed that death was truly the end. While modern skeptics might state that those people, similar to those of today who spend exorbitant amounts of money on caskets and headstones for their deceased loved ones, simply don't want to admit that the deceased is truly gone, the truth is that Sleepers know that the soul is eternal on a deep, instinctive level. Letting someone pass on without so much as a kind word or even a damning indictment is to make light of death, and in so doing one insults the Realm of Stygia. Moros mages note that letting a death slip by without marking the event somehow *feels* wrong, and take this as evidence that the Supernal is still present in the Fallen World, even if faintly.

Modern Western funeral practices disturb many Moros, however. The body is pumped full of chemicals and sealed in an airtight box, not allowed to rot and rejoin the soil (certainly not in a natural time frame, anyway). Worse yet, funeral parlors charge outrageous rates for their services and goods, taking advantage of people at their most vulnerable. Many Moros see the beautification of the corpse as an insult to the deceased's life — far better to acknowledge his death and move on than to try to recapture what has already gone from the world. Some Necromancers even posit that keeping a corpse from decaying creates a sympathetic connection between the soul and the body, preventing ghosts from passing on and keeping trapped in Stygia or in the Fallen World. On the other hand, some Moros work as morticians, running crematoriums and funeral parlors and using their abilities to manipulate corpses to great advantage, and so don't automatically decry modern funerary custom.

In any case, older funerary practices resonate better with the Supernal than modern ones. Placing coins over the eyes of the corpse, for example, is a practice with analogs in many cultures. The idea is that after death, the deceased has some tithe to pay or test to pass, be it paying a ferryman or other guide to take her to her final resting place or a judgment of her life and deeds. While the Moros cannot understand exactly what the Shades of Stygia are waiting for, the Moros do know that Stygia is not the only destination for souls leaving Earth. Other Realms allegedly exist, apart from the Supernal, and some Necromancers theorize that if a soul is unprepared for the journey (that is, the corpse doesn't have the metaphorical coins on his eyes), the soul will wind up in one of these other places.

Wealth and Riches

In many cultures, the lord of the dead is portrayed as having access to a vast amount of wealth. In fact, Pluto, the Roman god of the dead, lends us his name for the term "plutocrat." What makes this connection between death and the afterlife and money?

Some Moros speculate that gold, silver and other precious metals have a sympathetic connection with the Supernal Realms (largely but not exclusively with Stygia) that makes them nuggets of purity in an impure world. As such, bankers, financiers and other moneylenders the world over have a fleeting, almost instinctive insight into the higher world. Unfortunately, most become enraptured by what such riches represent in the Fallen World, missing any chance to Awaken and learn the higher truths of the precious substances they hoard.

Modern Moros have learned, interestingly, that paper money does *not* bear this Supernal connection. The perceived wealth of a substance in monetary terms is no guarantee of its magical sympathy.

Hauntings and Ghosts

The spirits of the dead factor into the mythology of every culture in the world. In some cases, these spirits are venerated ancestors, while in other cases, these spirits bedevil, trick and even harm the living. Some modern Christians believe that what people think of as ghosts are actually demons taking the form of deceased people to trick their relatives on Satan's behalf. The Moros know the truth about ghosts, of course, and find humanity's resistance to the notion that ghosts don't exist fascinating. Most Sleepers have had a paranormal experience of some kind, and yet most, if asked, can't really recount anything proving what they saw. A flickering phantom could have been a trick of the light; telekinetic activity could have been caused by wind, an unseen cat or another mundane cause. And yet, despite all the charlatan psychics, all of the debunked hoaxes and all of the assurances from religious figures that the dead pass on to better places, something sticks in the minds of Sleepers: the dead are among us.

This, say the Moros, is the connection between the Realm of Stygia and the Fallen World. Death can ford the Abyss because it is inevitable: everything ends.

The unconscious acknowledgment of the endurance of the soul after death leads to a myriad of beliefs and practices in Sleeper cultures. Funerary practices have already been discussed, but simple superstitions are also indicators. Some people hold their breath or cross their fingers when passing by a cemetery as protection against joining the ranks of the dead anytime soon, while others bang a stick on the cemetery gate to scare the unquiet spirits. Indeed, the custom of laying flowers on the graves of the deceased, while as much for the survivors as for the dead, is important in that this rite reinforces the notion that the dead don't pass from memory when they pass from our world. In short, the dead affect the living. If flowers are planted in or near the graves, this also underlines the idea that dead flesh is just matter and can feed the growth of new life; the soul has long since departed.

Some cultures believe that the soul lingers near the body for a time after death, and that the body cannot be cremated during this time or else the soul is burned with it. Moros mages feel that this belief might have originated from the fact that mages and certain spirits can forcibly remove a Sleeper's soul, which can, over time, cause him to lapse into a catatonic state resembling death. If the body is burned or interred before the soul can be replaced (assuming it can), the victim is well and truly gone.

The practice of contacting the dead, via Ouija boards, automatic writing, séances and other methods (besides the noxious "cold reading" practiced by parasitic "psychic readers;" see "Contemporary History") is also centuries old. Some cultures, as mentioned, view their departed ancestors as venerated givers of fortune and advice, and these spirits are sometimes worshipped outright. Other cultures contact the dead to ask for favors or wisdom, but also for the sheer thrill of talking to a ghost. Of course, most of the time when Sleepers attempt this sort of contact, nothing happens (whether they think so or not is another matter), although Sleepers do occasionally manage contact with a ghost. The point is, though, that despite attempts to prove or disprove the existence of such spirits, even the Abyss can't quite stamp out the certainty that the souls of the dead exist. Indeed, the Arcanum of Death probably has the most obvious analogs in Sleeper culture (at least where ghosts are concerned) — Sleeper mediums occasionally manifest ectoplasm, can command or speak with ghosts, and can, unfortunately, lose their bodies to possession if they aren't careful.

Protective Superstitions

Various kinds of metal and wood, over the years, have been regarded as proof against spirits and other malevolent entities. Cold-wrought iron is often thought to empower people against ghosts and demons, and although iron resonates more strongly with the Mastigos than the Moros, the Necromancers note Sleeper beliefs that iron horseshoes or nails will repel ghosts.

Protective customs grow even more elaborate, though. At one time, it was common to turn a coffin around in a circle when carrying it from the church to the graveyard (before the advent of hearses, obviously) so that the spirit couldn't find its way back from the afterlife. Likewise, an unbroken line of salt supposedly barred a ghost from entering a house. Moros can't say for certain that these measures work unfailingly, but have to admit that they and other protective methods sometimes net results even for Sleepers (see "Abjurations" on p. 213 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

Curses and Maledictions

The Necromancers must admit: many applications of the Arcanum of Death are malevolent, or at least destructive. Creating darkness, raising the dead as zombies and especially severing souls are well within the capability of the Moros, and these practices have ready analogs in Sleeper mythology. The popular perception of voodoo, for instance, includes such practices as changing mortals into soulless, mindless zombies through a special poison and keeping the soul of a trapped enemy in a special jar. Obviously, these despicable acts are possible for the Moros, and the mages see in voodoo a potential fount of magical knowledge.

Other cultures include similar curses, though. The notion of losing one's soul is, according to legend, what prompts us to bless each other after sneezing. Spellcasters often have telltale signs in legend, such as an aversion to salt (which, again, is also a protective measure against ghosts) or a reversed or missing shadow (and note that animation and sculpting of shadows falls under the same magical purview as dealing with ghosts).

Alchemy and Science

Of course, the Moros don't deal exclusively with Death. The practice of changing base metals into precious ones — alchemy — is a simple matter of will in Stygia. In the Fallen World, scientists and sorcerers labored for years to find the secret of doing so, and their writings and theories occasionally include glimpses of the Supernal. Indeed, Moros of all orders have based rotes of transmutation on ideas put forth by mortal alchemists. Texts speak of perfected metals and their applications in magical workings, and the Moros recognize shreds of the processes of creating orichalcum and lunargent from their own lost texts. Although the process of creating these metals involves the Prime Arcanum, the would-be metallurgist must be a Master of the Matter Arcanum, and therefore draw her power from Stygia, where matter is an easily shaped notion.

Indeed, alchemy, of a sort, is alive and well in the modern world. Scientists can create diamonds that are superior to natu-

ral stones. The Moros, of course, have been doing this by magic for years, and are hoping that the fact that Sleepers have learned to create diamonds in a lab will lead them to the realization that diamonds, just as most other "precious" stones and metals, have only the worth that people instill in them. Gold is soft and of little practical utility; diamonds are far more common than the jewelers of the Fallen World would have their customers believe. To the Moros, the scientific practices of strengthening steel and building lighter and stronger alloys are of much more value than simply making stones that sparkle.

Lead Into Gold and Other Difficult Spells

Why, some Moros wonder, is changing normal metal into precious metal so difficult? Some Necromancers point to the value that society places on precious metals, but society's will doesn't carry such weight in other matters.

A more plausible theory relates to the sympathetic connection to the Supernal, as mentioned on p. 12. Gold, silver, diamond and other substances that society happens to regard as valuable aren't valuable simply because they are attractive and rare (indeed, diamonds in particular are not as rare as the jewelers of the world would have Sleepers believe). These substances are valuable because, even blinded by the Lie, Sleepers can sense these substances' intrinsic connection to the Higher Realms. Because these substances carry a spark of magic, transmuting base materials into precious materials is difficult, magically speaking.

Other Moros put forth a darker theory: the Exarchs do not wish the Awakened to gain easy riches, and the Exarchs' will prevents a disciple of Matter from changing lead to gold.

Praxis

The following sections contain ideas and information about how Moros mages shape their environment, from the appearance of the sanctums to the nimbuses of their magic to the look of the mages themselves.

Appearance

As mentioned in **Mage: The Awakening**, Moros mages often dress as though they were in mourning. This varies by culture, of course, and is sometimes as simple as a dark suit with a black armband. The symbolism is clear, though — the Moros are always an inch from death. By dressing as though they are about to attend a funeral, they remind themselves of the fragility of life, theirs and others'.

Although all Necromancers keep themselves aware of the brevity of life, not all of them choose to do so in the same way. Funerary dress suits many on the Path, but others, particularly those who deal with Sleepers on a regular basis, prefer to be a bit less noticeable. Such mages dress in normal street clothes or business attire, depending on the nature of their lifestyles and the occasion. Such mages say that being out among the throngs of humanity, watching all of them die a little more every day, is all the reminder of how quickly life flies that they need. Dressing to celebrate the slow death of the world is rather depressing, and the Necromancers don't wallow in depression.

Despite the fact that the Moros are well aware of how quickly the spark of life can be snuffed, many of them spend a great deal of time and energy on their appearance. While many Moros prefer to dress as though in mourning, they also prefer to be dressed well. Their clothes are usually perfectly cleaned and pressed, and Moros often wear gold or platinum jewelry embellished with precious stones (see the sidebar on the subject of precious materials). This has the effect of making the Necromancers seem a bit vain or self-absorbed, a reputation that isn't helped by the fact that Moros take themselves and their magic very seriously.

To the Moros, though, everything that matters *must* be taken seriously, for tomorrow might never come. Likewise, anything that isn't important enough to merit a Moros' full attention might just as well be scrapped. For many Necromancers, this attitude means that they aren't afraid to admit failure or give up a cause, project or argument when it is obviously that it can't be completed successfully. In others, the knowledge that death is only a breath away gives them a frightening tenacity, and they never let anything go, refusing to back down while any shred of hope remains.

As Wisdom Falls

Moros, similar to all mages, are susceptible to hubris. In the case of those on the Path of Doom, however, a falling Wisdom rating can result in less attention being paid to personal appearance and upkeep. The Moros becomes despondent, hyper-focused and unable to juggle her own cleanliness and maintenance and her magical studies and agendas.

On the other hand, some Moros go the other direction as their Wisdom declines, becoming afraid of allowing their mundane appearance to

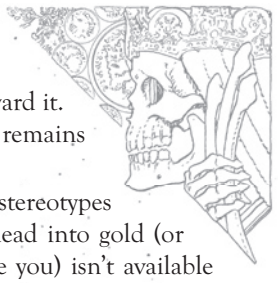
slip even a bit. This mage spends an inordinate amount of time on grooming and attire, and, for what it's worth, usually looks impeccable. Magical acumen doesn't always suffer, however, because the mage is happy to use her skill in Matter to help in always looking perfect. This slide into vanity is nothing short of avoidance, however. By focusing on shallow concerns to the exclusion of weightier matters, the mage avoids danger, but also becomes soft and unprepared. This is counter to the higher truth of the Path, that death can come at any time, and mages who ignore this truth are ill-prepared to face death when necessary.

Attitudes

Walkers on the Path of Doom are often serious and dour. It isn't that they don't have senses of humor, simply that they find humor a luxury, one that they can't spare the time to enjoy. They don't deny or hinder others who would rather spend time in pursuit of enjoyment than work, but they aren't interested in opening their sanctums to such people, either. Mages in general are willful and driven as a rule, but Necromancers tend to be nothing short of workaholic. They tell themselves that they will have time for pleasure when their work is done, but they never seem to reach the point at which they feel satisfied. In their defense, of course, life *is* short. If a project can be perfected with one more hour's work, what is one hour weighed against a lifetime? Wouldn't that hour be better spent in pursuit of perfection or beautification than in frivolity?

This attitude is most common among younger Moros. Once a Necromancer has some years and some experience under his belt, he tends to find that humor and pleasure are worthwhile pursuits, if not goals. "After all," more than one Moros mentor has said to her apprentice, "if death comes for you tomorrow, your last thought won't be about your studies or the great mysteries you haven't had the time to uncover, but hopefully about what has motivated you and brought you pleasure." Young Moros don't always grasp this concept, but that is the folly of those far from the grave.

Not all Moros fall into this trap, of course. Some Necromancers, particularly those raised in cultures with respect, rather than fear, for death are known for their rather morbid senses of humor. These Moros point out that the best funerals are the ones at which the mourners can laugh or at least smile at their memories of the deceased, enjoying the knowledge that they lived full lives (no matter how many years they lasted). These mages are just as focused as their more dour contemporaries: they acknowledge the truth of life's frailty, they just choose to take a more light-hearted attitude toward it. Still, "so much to do and so little time" remains a mantra for the Moros.



Not all Moros are rich, despite stereotypes to the contrary. The power to turn lead into gold (or charcoal into diamond, or what have you) isn't available to newly Awakened mages, although powerful mentors often bequeath their students a bit of material wealth so that the apprentices can concentrate on their studies. The Path does call out to the greedy and the power-hungry, however, and since the applications of much of the Necromancer's magic allows for wealth (Matter: transmutation) and power (Death: commanding ghosts and raising servants) Moros often do seem avaricious. Indeed, a Moros can easily fall into the trap of seeing himself as a sort of "lord of the dead" and revel in the power to command otherworldly beings. The irony there, of course, is that all power is fleeting, and once death comes for the mage he is no longer a lord of anything. Is it worth it, then, to be powerful for a brief time or to build something that will act as a monument to one's life? Necromancers fall on both sides of that question, and some even choose a darker option. By becoming one of the dreaded Tremere liches, a Moros can ostensibly live forever. This notion is so antithetical to the precepts of the Path, of course, that few Moros take this route. To those who grow afraid of the inevitability of death, however, this obscene road to power is tempting.

Nimbus

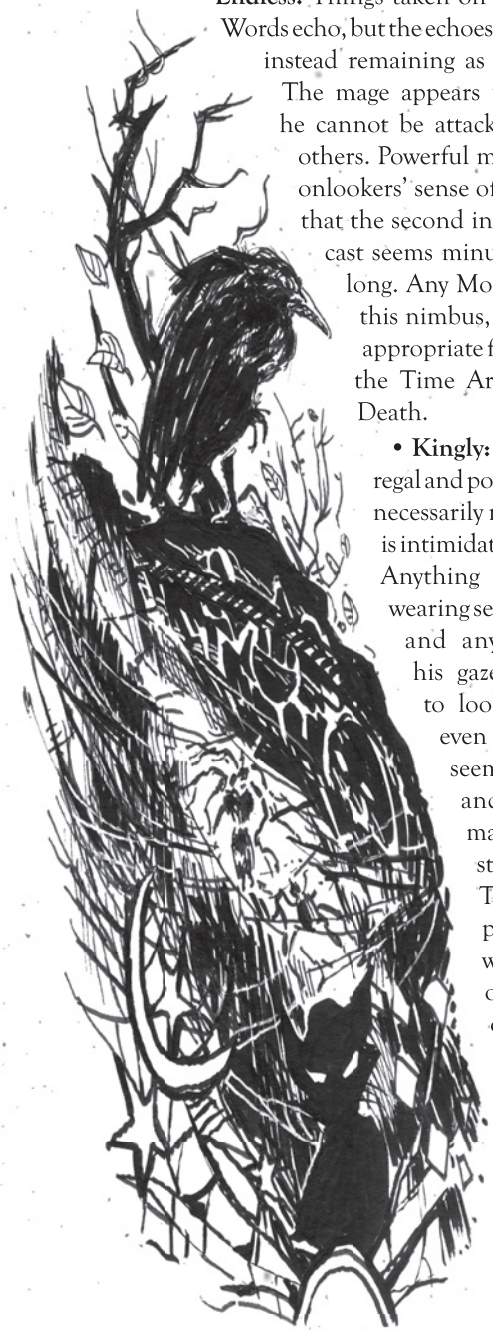
The "Haunting" nimbus described on p. 100 of **Mage: The Awakening** is one viable choice for the feel of Moros magic, but by no means the only one. Below are more ideas for potential nimbuses. Feel free to develop a nimbus for your character that reflects her unique take on magic and the Path of Doom, and remember that a nimbus can change over time as the mage's power develops and changes.

- **Bleak:** Sounds become dampened and colors muted. Depth perception becomes difficult as edges of objects blur together and points of reference are hard to resolve. Horizons seem distant, and words seem to echo. A pervasive feeling of hopelessness arises, as though whatever might be accomplished at present ultimately won't matter. With powerful magic, onlookers might start to cry or a cold rain might start falling. Any Moros who specializes in the Death Arcanum might exhibit this nimbus.
- **Brittle:** Everything becomes delicate. Clothes seem to tear easily, objects crack or shift with the slightest touch and taking a step seems to strain the floor or leave dents in the ground. With powerful magic, a thin layer of powder might appear on stone as though it is disintegrating. Moros who commonly use Death or Matter to disable or destroy objects might exhibit this nimbus. **Note:** Nimbuses do not actually damage objects or lower Durability, so even if a material frays

a bit, it still works perfectly normally.

• **Eerie:** Sounds take on a slightly higher pitch and a faint echo, and colors shift toward the blue end of the spectrum. Onlookers see movement from the corners of their eyes, but this ceases if they try to focus on it. Nothing moves quickly when directly watched. Movements seem slow and dreamlike, and a disturbing calm surrounds everything. With powerful magic, the mage's words seem to ring in listener's ears before she speaks, creating the perception that she is out of synch with her own body. This nimbus is common for Moros who study Mind as well as Death.

• **Endless:** Things taken on a timeless quality. Words echo, but the echoes don't fade entirely, instead remaining as a soft undertone. The mage appears unassailable, as if he cannot be attacked or affected by others. Powerful magic might distort onlookers' sense of time to the point that the second in which the spell is cast seems minutes or even hours long. Any Moros might develop this nimbus, but it is especially appropriate for those who learn the Time Arcanum as well as Death.



• **Kingly:** The mage appears regal and powerful (though not necessarily noble — the feeling is intimidating, not inspiring). Anything he is holding or wearing seems like a treasure, and anyone who meets his gaze feels compelled to look away. Animals, even inanimate objects, seem to defer to him, and, with powerful magic, even shadows stay below his gaze. This nimbus is appropriate for Moros who make a habit of raising zombies or commanding ghosts.

• **Mutable:** Things seem in flux. Objects might undergo subtle shifts in color, while light and shadow intensify and dampen seemingly at random. Water flows in whirlpools or waves, even if it's currently in a drinking glass. Fabrics stiffen momentarily, while metal or glass seems to warp when touched. Powerful magic might cause iron to change to copper or lead to gold for a few seconds. Mages who use Matter to transmute or transmogrify might exhibit this nimbus.

• **Paranoid:** Shadows turn to face the mage or the target of the spell. Onlookers feel breath on their necks and hear whispers from darkened corners. Footsteps might sound from above or below the mage's current position, even if he is outdoors. Someone picking up an object might develop a distinct sense of guilt, as though he were stealing it. Powerful magic might result in ghostly faces appearing in reflective surfaces, watching those around the mage with stern or angry expressions. This nimbus is appropriate for mages who commonly use ghosts or spirits as spies or contacts, or who study the Spirit Arcanum.

• **Respectful:** Light and sound seem to defer to the mage; shadows darken as he approaches and when he speaks, other sounds dampen. People have trouble meeting the mage's eyes, and their gazes are naturally drawn to whatever he points to. The respectful air doesn't just apply to the mage, though. People aren't inclined to become angry or violent — it just seems inappropriate, especially when powerful magic is involved. Necromancers who use magic to contact or heal ghosts or to enter Twilight might exhibit this nimbus.

• **Rotting:** Foul smells of decay emanate from the mage or from her target. Fabric, food and other soft materials sag and seem befouled, while harder organic matter (such as wood) feels soft and porous to the touch. Onlookers feel unclean and might have trouble drawing breath, as though the air tastes foul. Powerful magic might result in fungus or mold growing in corners or on foodstuffs. This nimbus is appropriate for Moros who study Life as well as Death.

• **Solid:** Sounds do not echo, but seem pregnant with meaning. Footsteps are loud as though the person's weight had increased. Doors and windows are harder to move and substances that should tear easily, such as paper, require effort to destroy (although again, no actual change in Durability takes place; the effect is subtle and has no affect on game mechanics). Liquid seems to become slightly more viscous, and with powerful magic might even congeal for a second. Necromancers who make common use of the Matter Arcanum to strengthen material might exhibit this nimbus.

Sanctums

While any mage might be protective of her home space and her privacy, the Moros have a reputation for being this way. Part of this is because of how seriously the Necromancers take themselves and their works. A Moros' sanctum might be home to preserved corpses waiting to be turned into zombies,

concoctions of liquid metal bubbling away in special cauldrons or hunks of lead in a slow process of turning into gold. The mage's ongoing projects might be delicate or even dangerous, and so the Moros obviously doesn't want them disturbed.

In addition to these sorts of concerns, though, the Moros view their sanctums as private pieces of Stygia. The Supernal Realm with which the Moros claim sympathy is quiet, peaceful and contemplative, and Moros sanctums tend to be as well. Necromancers prefer mild temperatures, perhaps on the cool side, but not cold enough to be uncomfortable (though they might have higher tolerance for cold than other people). Lights are usually dim, and a Moros is likely to "create space" by lighting only the part of the sanctum he is currently using, rather than employing large overhead lights that brighten an entire room. Most Moros work better in silence, but some prefer white noise such as fans or ocean waves, and others find the distant wail of train whistles a soothing reminder that the outside world hasn't disappeared.

If possible, the mage puts a large degree of empty space in and around her sanctum, again reminiscent of Stygia. Large lawns or meadows, long driveways, immense foyers or sitting rooms in the fronts of houses and winding staircases are all common fixtures, provided the Moros has the monetary means (and, of course, many of them do). Moros also build hidden rooms and secret hallways linking different areas of the sanctum if they have means, allowing them to move around the sanctum without disturbing the parts that visitors would see. Indeed, Necromancer sanctums could be likened to tombs or museums. They are beautifully decorated, but frozen in time, and not meant for interaction.

Many Moros prefer one large space to a number of separate rooms, depending on the nature of their magical studies. Since Necromancers can look through matter easily, they tend to prefer it simply not be there, enabling them to move from one part of their sanctums to another with ease. Of course, opinions vary. Some Moros use sanctums that feel like catacombs, with winding hallways, dead ends and false doors. Anyone with a little skill in the Matter Arcanum can find her way around, but Sleepers (and, hopefully, intruders) will quickly become lost.

A Moros' sanctum might be decked with precious finery, the floors made of fine marble and the wooden surfaces inlaid with gold. A skilled alchemist, after all, can use diamonds as simple window-dressing, and some Necromancers do exactly that. Other Moros, particularly those who keep a separate workshop into which they invite no one, leave their sanctums as sparse as possible. Matter, after all, is just a tool, and matter with no function just gets in the way. If no one but the mage will ever see the decorations, then what purpose do they serve?

Moros who specialize in dealing with ghosts sometimes move a phantom's anchors to a special room in the sanctum. Over time, such Moros become pack rats of ghostly anchors,



collecting objects tied to specters that no longer lurk in Twilight. Whether a Moros commonly deals with ghosts or not, however, most Necromancers prefer sanctums that are closer to the dead. Haunted houses, cemeteries, funeral homes and hospices make good neighbors for Moros sanctums. Of course, this tends to infuse the sanctum with an eerie or even depressing ambiance, but with the Moros' outlook on death, they simply feel at home.

Last Rites

Drawing Mana from the Fallen World requires patience and discipline. Fortunately, the Moros usually have no shortage of either trait.

Oblations

The following are some examples of the oblations typical to the Moros Path. Most Moros learn an oblation during their initial training with a mentor and perhaps during their induction into an order, if applicable. Over time, however, many mages develop their own rituals for drawing Mana from Hallows that are consistent with their own magical practices.

Moros oblations tend to fall into one of three categories: transition, reverence and observation.

Oblations of Transition

Oblations of transition are the most commonly taught to new Moros and involve changing an object from one state to another. As Moros grow more experienced, these oblations tend to grow more elaborate, as simple transitions no longer hold their interest. The following examples are fairly simplistic, however.

• **Burning:** The Moros takes a small, easily flammable object and burns it a little at a time during the course of the hour, noting the process of matter changing to energy and the residue (ash) left behind. Sometimes this process involves building a bonfire (appropriate for very powerful Hallows or more experienced mages), but a sheet of notebook paper will do if the mage can make it last. Moros with some expertise in the Prime Arcanum sometimes use the Mana gained from the Hallow to create tass from the ash or coals from the fire.

• **Dissolution:** The Moros dissolves a solid or powder into liquid. Since the oblation still takes an hour, dissolution requires either a large amount of liquid and solid agent or a solid that is difficult to dissolve. Sugar in cold water works well in a pinch. Though this oblation is somewhat tedious, it's helpful to Moros learning the principles of Transmogrification.

• **Death:** A mage can kill a living being as part of an oblation, and doing so even has the benefit of greatly reducing the time needed. Animals the size of rats (or larger, but if the mage is willing to kill a larger animal to gain Mana performing a blood sacrifice is probably more efficient) are sufficient, although some mages have been known to cut down trees found near the Hallow and sear the stumps. In any case, the oblation only takes as long as the organism takes to die, rather than the usual hour, but performing this sort of oblation requires a degeneration roll if the mage's Wisdom rating is 6 or more. (Roll three dice.)

Oblations of Reverence

Respect and reverence are key principles to the Moros Path, but, at the same time, they are some of the most commonly ignored virtues among hubristic Necromancers. Oblations of reverence help such Moros in keeping their magic in perspective by reinforcing the notion that they, too, are not long for the world.

• **Funeral:** This oblation is common among cabals with more than one Moros member. One Moros lies on the ground while the other(s) deliver a short eulogy, naming his accomplishments and triumphs but focusing more on that which he did *not* achieve. The funeral oblation isn't meant to depress the Moros so much as remind him that he will never manage to meet all of his goals, and so focusing on what he can accomplish is more important than dwelling on what he cannot or spreading himself too thin.

• **Burial:** During the course of the oblation, the Moros digs a small grave and buries an object that was once important to him but has become broken, useless or outlasted its meaning to him. Some Moros find that their choices of magical tools change as their magical styles and preferences change; others perform this oblation upon joining or leaving a cabal, or gaining or losing an apprentice.

• **Beautify:** The mage polishes a piece of metal or stone, taking care during the course of the hour to remove all dirt, scuffs and impurities. More experienced mages incorporate magic into this cleaning process (unless they are under a dedication that prohibits this sort of spellcasting). Mechanically inclined Moros perform a similar rite during which they perform maintenance on machines or appliances, but traditionalists feel that the rote nature of polishing metal is necessary for the full effect of the oblation.

• **Conversing with the Dead:** This oblation, typically only performed by mages with experience dealing with ghosts, involves summoning a ghost or talking to one nearby (if the Hallow also happens to be a haunt). During the course of the hour, the mage is expected to listen more than talk, unless the ghost directly asks the mage questions. This oblation requires a ghost that is willing to speak to the mage, of course, and a ghost with enough self-awareness to know what it is.

Oblations of Observation

The first principles of all of the Arcana involve Knowing and Unveiling. These Practices require patience and focus, and oblations provide good training for such spells. The following oblations focus on meditation and scrutiny, and thus tend to blind the mage to what is going on around her.

Therefore, they aren't popular choices in strange Hallows or tense surroundings.

• **Gross scrutiny:** The mage uses her knowledge of Matter to analyze and catalog every substance in the immediate area, looking through walls to name the wires and components of the construction, or through water to learn the different sediments that float through it.

• **Subtle scrutiny:** The mage looks into Twilight, making note of all of the ghosts he can see, discerning whether anyone has died in the area in the past (so far as he can tell; mages with some knowledge of Time make even more careful studies in this matter) and trying to learn the cause of any spiritual turbulence.

• **Death meditation:** Similar to the funeral oblation, the mage spends an hour in deep thought, contemplating her own death. In particular, she tries to realize what people, places, objects and principles would bind her as a ghost, if any. Mages who perform this oblation often, it is said, never linger as ghost mages (see pp. 327–328 of **Mage: The Awakening**) after death, having already resolved any potential anchors.

Dedications

The dedications common to the Moros are similar to the oblations. Most dedications involve death in some way, either symbolically or literally, and they are often undertaken with simplification in mind. The emphasis on simplicity is basic to the Moros Path: by eliminating distractions, one is free to witness transition at its most basic level. Moros dedications are usually also designed with an eye toward keeping the mage humble. Any mage might fall to hubris, of course, but a mage with power over death, some feel, runs a greater risk than most.

Temporary Vows

The mechanics for dedications given in the Introduction state that a vow must be maintained constantly and the character receives one point of Mana per week of observance. Some of the vows listed here, however, are difficult to hold to for months at a time, both in a spiritual and logistical sense. As such, mages often adhere to these vows for a few weeks or a month, and end that observance when a predetermined time has elapsed or when they feel a given lesson has been learned.

If the character vows to follow a dedication through a set deadline, or until he or a mentor feels that a given goal has been reached, the character does *not* lose the point of Mana for breaking the vow at that dedication's predetermined end point. If he breaks the vow before that time, however, he loses the Mana as usual.

Vow of Silence

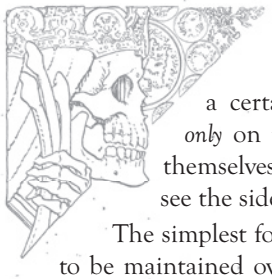
The dead do not speak, at least not to most of the inhabitants of the Fallen World. The mage has vowed to remain silent. Mages who belong to cabals, of course, must still be able to communicate, and written notes, hand signals and even magical methods of communication are permitted. Magic, actually, is the preferred method of expression for such Moros, because the point of the dedication is that they, similar to the Shades of Stygia, cannot communicate under the strictures of the Abyss.

A less stringent form of this vow allows the mage to use the High Speech, but the benefits of this dedication are lessened as well. The mage only gains a point of Mana every 10 days rather than every week for observing this variant of the dedication.

Vow of Poverty

On a Path in which anyone of sufficient skill can become rich in short order, it is important to remember that not only do precious metals, gems and the money they fetch not buy more time on Earth, but they can't purchase love, wisdom or any of the other truly important things in life either. A vow of poverty is an eye-opening experience for a mage used to being able to transform lead into gold, and this dedication is sometimes imposed as a punishment (enforced, obviously, by another mage skilled in the Fate Arcanum).

The dedication to poverty comes in many forms. Some mages refuse to earn money (they might still work, however, but donate any earnings to a charity of their choice). Others refuse to earn more than they need to survive, and cut their diets back to the barest essentials. Some mages even spend



a certain amount of time homeless, relying *only* on their magic to feed, clothe and shelter themselves. (This is normally a temporary setup; see the sidebar.)

The simplest form of this vow, and the one most likely to be maintained over time, only requires the mage to live below a certain income level, whether the official "poverty line" or some other arbitrary marker. The mage is expected to solve as many problems as he can without paying others to do so, which is of course much easier when one has access to the Matter Arcanum.

Most mages observing a vow of poverty change their manner of dress to reflect the lifestyle. They dress simply and eschew jewelry and other embellishments.

Vow of Stasis

The mage vows not to use magic to alter the world, only to strengthen or protect. This vow usually comes in two forms, either the Gross or the Subtle.

The Gross Vow of Stasis prevents the mage from using Matter to reshape, transmute or destroy the world around him. The mage can still use spells such as Matter 2 "Unseen Aegis" or Matter 3 "Alter Integrity" (to strengthen an object), but cannot use Matter 2 "Alter Accuracy" or any Transmutation or Transmogrification spells.

The Subtle Vow of Stasis prevents the use of the Death Arcanum in much the same way. Spells such as Death 1 "Shadow Sculpting" or Death 3 "Quicken Corpse" are forbidden, while using Death to speak with ghosts and even to heal them is acceptable. As with the Gross Vow of Stasis, the mage cannot use the Arcanum to enact change in the world around her. Healing and interacting with ghosts is considered acceptable because she is not changing the status quo, but raising a corpse as a zombie alters the world in an obvious and jarring manner. In general, vulgar uses of the Arcanum are verboten, while covert uses are *usually* considered acceptable.

A more stringent version of this vow prevents using both Arcana, or from using one of them even to strengthen objects. Only spells of the Knowing and Unveiling Practices are permitted.

Vow of Death

This vow is almost always undertaken on a temporary basis, for it requires the mage to die in a symbolic fashion. To mages, though, a symbolic death can be quite close to the real thing.

The simplest way for a mage to "die" is to use the Death Arcanum to mimic death. The mage determines how long he intends to spend dead, casts the spell Death 3 "Suppress Own Life," and takes his leave of the world for a time. Some mages even arrange to be interred (though not embalmed, of course) during this time, but must be careful that they will be dug up before the spell wears off.

Another, more laborious way of enacting this vow is spend time out of contact with the living. Some mages physically enter Twilight, but this is a dangerous proposition and so is uncommon. Others simply refuse to speak to anyone who cannot speak to ghosts, weaving spells around themselves so that the living cannot see or touch them (less-experienced mages who wish to undertake this vow receive aid from mentors). If the mage doesn't wish to use magic for the vow, though, he simply drops out of contact, spending time in isolation as a hermit, for as long as he wishes the dedication to last. Again, this vow is *normally* only undertaken on a temporary basis (see the sidebar), but there are stories of Moros who have remained "dead" indefinitely.

Society

A mage might self-identify as a Moros, but her more direct and constant place in Awakened society is defined by her position in her order, cabal and Consilium. The following sections explore how Necromancers fit into these groups.

Forums

When Moros hold forums exclusive to the Path, the subject matter is most often something relating to ghosts or the undead. The participants in the forum keep their orders and Consilii informed of what is going on, of course, but the Moros like to first discuss matters of death with their peers. If the corpses in a nearby mortuary are rising up and wandering out into the night or if a powerful mage has become a ghost and is bedeviling her former students, other Necromancers might have insight into the problem that mages of other Paths simply don't share.

Necromancer forums aren't necessarily formal affairs, but the participants do tend to be unfailingly polite. The site chosen is normally attached to a particular mage's sanctum, though not always part of the sanctum itself (as Moros value their privacy, even from other Moros). The Moros calling the forum explains the situation and asks for feedback from those present. Typically, the oldest and most experienced mages present speak first, though if a younger mage has particular experience in the matter he is given the floor. (Taking the example of the ghost mage above, if one of the assembled Moros actually is one of the students in question he would be allowed to speak out of turn.)

The Moros don't usually go in for long ceremonies or formal greetings; life is too short. Their conversation at forums is short and to the point, although individual members might linger afterwards to discuss unrelated matters.

Paths

The sections below detail the Moros' dealings with mages of other Paths. In general, mages of any Paths can form cabals and even friendships, but still might judge other Awakened by

their Paths initially. Mastigos, for instance, are often considered manipulative, and support exists for such stereotypes. When a Moros meets a Thyrsus for the first time, there might well be some tension.

This tension doesn't have to remain past an initial conversation, of course. They are, however, bound by very different Realms with different laws, and a certain amount of friction exists between their magical styles, if not the mages themselves.

Acanthus

It's easy for the dour, reserved and somber Moros to scoff at the Acanthus. Many of them are carefree and happy-go-lucky, trusting in their knowledge of Fate and their ability to sense, if not actually see, the future to guide them. Scoffing at the Enchanters, however, underlies several other emotions.

First, many Moros envy the Acanthus. Moros know the *eventual* end: everything dies. But that's honestly not much help in day-to-day existence. The Acanthus can tell if chance meetings are significant and what the outcome of seemingly random events will be. Moros can, of course, learn these skills, but never with the same degree of acumen as the Enchanters.

At the same time, some Moros find the Acanthus annoying and dangerous. Fate is a powerful tool, more powerful than Death, if applied strategically. Some Acanthus learn to wield this power responsibly, but others simply flit from place to place, traveling as the wind takes them. The Moros see what many Acanthus do as a waste of time (in a very literal sense, since the Acanthus can do more with time than most people) and despise their careless attitudes. Some Moros even feel that wielding Fate or Time magic in an inappropriate manner is blasphemous somehow, an insult to the Supernal Realms (to which the Acanthus might quite rightly tell the Moros that if he hasn't been to Arcadia, he should keep quiet).

Mastigos

Inexperienced Moros sometimes make the mistake of calling the Mastigos "undisciplined." This isn't true at all; Mastigos, by nature, have to remain just as strongly in control of themselves and their magic as any mage. They don't take their cues from others, true, and this might be what upsets the Moros. More probably, though, the Moros can sense the chaos of the Realm of Pandemonium in the Mastigos. That chaos, when compared to the eerie quiet of Stygia, is bound to produce some friction.

The Mastigos confuse the Moros, because the creatures that inhabit their Supernal Realm are inhuman. The Shades of Stygia are understandable, patient and knowledgeable, and many Moros would love a chance to journey back to the Watchtower. The creatures of Pandemonium, though, are nightmarish — and yet some Mastigos seem quite happy with the arrangement. This makes the Moros nervous.

When the Warlocks and the Necromancers can find common ground, though, the results are impressive. A Necromancer with some command of the Mind Arcanum (or a Mastigos ally) can see what fetters a ghost to the Fallen World quickly, and the applications of combining Matter and Space are limitless. Indeed, the science of perfect geometry, which in turn spills into sacred architecture, is one that mages of both Paths still practice.

Obrimos

Claiming to act with "Divine Right" is a bold claim, and yet the Obrimos often do exactly that. The Moros see this as the worst kind of hubris, because regardless of what a mortal accomplishes during his time on Earth, in the end he will come to dust, and the Obrimos would do well to remember that. Of course, the Obrimos often counter that by good works on Earth (whatever "good works" means to the Theurgist in question), one can escape this ignominious fate. This infuriates the Moros, of course. *No one* escapes death.

Once the semantics and initial arguments are out of the way, though, the Obrimos and the Moros are actually making the same point: the body dies, but the soul is eternal. The disposition of the soul might well depend on what the person does during life, but neither side can say for certain what happens after a certain point. Therefore, while young or bullheaded Obrimos and Moros waste time arguing philosophy that has no direct bearing on the world, more intelligent mages look past what they don't know and focus on what they can *do*.

A cabal with both a competent Moros and a skilled Obrimos is capable of producing magical artifacts and enchanted items of the first caliber. Commanding Matter, the Moros crafts the perfect physical vessel to hold a spell or a reserve of Mana. Skilled in Prime, the Obrimos enchants the item. Although such work is arduous and time-consuming, it's well worth the effort as the entire cabal can be outfitted with small trinkets to help shield them from unfriendly magic, activate the Mage Sight in ways that they usually cannot and draw upon reserves of power in times of need.

Thyrsus

The Moros and the Thyrsus should have much in common. They are part of the same cycle: Life and Death, Spirit and Matter. They both have a certain disregard for Sleeper morality as part and parcel to their Awakenings: the Moros because they know that life ends in dust and the Thyrsus because they know that life is chaos and blood. And yet, the mages often find they have little to say to one another.

The Path of Doom and the Path of Ecstasy lead to some of the same conclusions, but they take very different routes. The Thyrsus and the Moros are opposite sides of the same coin, and while that gives them some common ground they also have a

gulf between them. The Primal Wild is vibrant, full of life, and never still. Stygia is somber, quiet and contemplative. Life and Death might be part of the same cycle, but they are antithetical.

This doesn't mean that Moros and Thyrsus mages can't share an order or a cabal, become friends or even become lovers. Opposites do, sometimes, attract. Indeed, the biggest point of contention between Necromancers and Shamans might be humanity. Stygia plays host to human souls, while in the Primal Wild, *everything* has a spirit but there are no humans to be found. Moros have a difficult time with the notion that the materials that they work with and the tools they wield have any kind of sentience (or rather, that such a thing makes any difference to the finished product), while Thyrsus balk at the notion that human beings are the most important species on the planet just because they managed to outsmart natural selection.

Orders

All five of the orders value the Moros in different ways, and, likewise, a given Necromancer might be drawn to any of the orders depending upon his individual goals and emphases.

Adamantine Arrow

The Adamantine Arrow is made up of soldiers and warriors. As such, the Moros can play valuable roles in the order. The most obvious ones, of course, stem from their magic. With Matter, they can make weapons well-balanced, make bullets pierce armor (even magical armor if the crafter is skilled in Prime as well) and weave shields of air and stone around their allies. With the Arcanum of Death, they can call up reinforcements from the spirits of the dead and the bodies of the slain, as well as blind enemies with patches of darkness and "kill" unfriendly magic.

Their other uses to the order, however, are less intuitive but just as important. Moros mages understand death on a level that other Awakened cannot. Thus, they can help warriors to cope with the things they must do in service to their order, and with the fears of death that all people experience. Their presence and the haunting resonance of their magic serves as a reminder that death is an ending, but not *the* ending.

Free Council

The Necromancers usually feel that the Free Council is superfluous, a reaction to a perceived threat rather than a true philosophy. The threat of the Lie is real, of course, but the other orders are just as equipped to deal with, if not more so, than a bunch of libertines congratulating themselves on inclusiveness.

And yet, the Moros cannot deny the number of dead souls who gave up their earthly shells in defense of freedom, equality and other such principles. They cannot argue that the methods that Sleeper science has developed to strengthen metal or reinforce stone are easily equal to the magic of the Necromancers. And, as more Sleepers become aware of phenomena such as EVP, the Moros wonder if the Free Council might not be correct in their assertions that techné is the magic of modern age. Indeed, the Moros who join the Free Council are usually technologically savvy, using their arts in Death and Matter in conjunction with scientific and para-scientific theory.

Guardians of the Veil

The Moros are not, despite stereotypes, all death-obsessed and secretive. They do, however, know how to remain silent, how to slay light and how to call up and quiet the ghosts of those who die with too many secrets. Is it any wonder that the Eye of the Dragon courts the Necromancers?

Moros make superb assassins, and the fact that they can magically change the perceived cause of death to a victim only aids matters, as does the ability to change any object into a bladed weapon with a little careful transmutation. But the Guardians of the Veil aren't all killers. Detectives and spies also fill their ranks, and Necromancers work well in either role. One Moros might animate the dead and use her magic to see through their eyes, while another traces a subject by adding a faint dusting of powder to his coat (that the mage can then track with Matter).

The order's emphasis on individual merit and excellence suits the Moros nature. Necromancers are often self-reliant, if not outright loners, a product of their fatal Awakenings. (Everyone dies alone, after all, but not everyone has the skill to step away from death.) Not all Moros are secretive, but many of them engage in magical practices that are unpleasant enough that secrecy is desirable. As such, the Eye of the Dragon makes for a good home.

Mysterium

Many Necromancers find the Mysterium to be a natural fit. The wisdom of the ages is written in the stones and bricks of ancient ruins, in faded ink upon desiccated tomes and locked in the minds of mad ghosts. A clever Moros can decipher all of these secrets, and the Mysterium provides the means to do so.

In general, the Necromancers of the Mysterium tend to be less dour and morose than those of other orders. Mysterium Necromancers are not interested in killing or destroying (or, indeed, reanimating or building) as much as discovery. Still, the Moros admit that their work is still reanimation of the dead, after a fashion, except that they are "reanimating" knowledge rather than flesh. The World of Darkness has no shortage of secrets, and the Moros excel at digging up that which has supposedly been lost to time and repairing it.

There comes a point, though, in the career of every mage of the Alae Draconis when she discovers something that should

not be. Perhaps it is a gateway into a place that shouldn't be accessed or a rote that should never have been codified, let alone inscribed. The Moros then has a choice — destroy the offending item (if possible), lock it away so it will never trouble the Awakened or learn what she can from it. There is no universal answer to this dilemma, but the Moros tend to face the problem more often, given their skill in calling up spirits of the dead and finding hidden rooms and lost artifacts.

Silver Ladder

Some Moros mages look at the Silver Ladder and shake their heads in disbelief. The end of life is the same for all, Sleeper or mage. Everything comes to dust, and, thus, the notion of leading the masses to enlightenment smacks of martyrdom and hubris.

Not so, say other Necromancers, because at the end of life, what really matters is how one lived. Better to die poor, battered and used than cautious and pristine, and the théarchs echo that sentiment. Humanity has potential, but that potential cannot be reached with caution and reservation. The Moros of the Silver Ladder recognize that, and are not afraid to die in pursuit of a greater goal.

More practically, Necromancers of this order lean toward advisory roles, consulting the wisdom of the dead to counsel leaders among the living. The Silver Ladder also makes a good home for Moros with a great deal of ambition, but this also means that the most prideful of the Necromancers often join the Vox Draconis.

Sleepers

Moros mages vary widely in their views of Sleepers. Some of the most common attitudes toward the throngs of humanity are the following:

• **Pity:** Everyone dies, but not everyone understands what that means. The cold, silent eternity at the end of life is actually somewhat comforting, looked at in the right way. Sleepers, however, have built elaborate moral systems based on outdated theological constructs that scare them into behaviors completely counter to their instincts, and then fret when they violate those systems. The Moros sometimes want to reach out to the Sleepers, explaining that there is nothing to fear — death is equality, peace and rest.

• **Frustration:** For many of the same reasons they pity humanity, some Moros grow annoyed and even angry. If Sleepers could just focus a little, look beyond what they believe and focus on what they know and can sense, they wouldn't have to be afraid and might even be able to rouse themselves from Quiescence. Embittered Moros state that a Sleeper might go from birth to death without seeing, saying or feeling a damned thing beyond what the Abyss allows.

• **Envy:** Some Moros, particularly those who become Banishers, feel that they were better off before they saw what waits in Stygia. Typically, such mages were devout believers in one religion or another and were deeply conflicted by what they saw upon their Awakenings.

• **Hope:** As time goes on, Sleeper curiosity grows by leaps and bounds. Yes, many of the obvious scientific precepts of the world have already been codified, and so the two most obvious courses of action now are greater accessibility (making those precepts easily understandable) and delving even deeper. Glass can be made bulletproof — why not fabric? A ship can withstand reentry into the atmosphere — why not a plane that can withstand a crash intact? Many Sleepers believe in life after death — why not a way to communicate with the dead? Of course, such development carries risks and places great responsibility in the hands of Sleepers, but hopeful Moros believe that humanity can handle the challenge.

• **Compassion:** Everyone dies, but life shouldn't be snuffed out callously. Life is precious, and Sleepers don't have the first clue how precarious their lives are. Mages battle each other in the shadows, undead predators steal Sleepers' blood and Sleepers ignore it all because they have been trained to do from birth. Some Moros become fierce protectors of humanity, happy to let Sleepers kill each other but watchful for the supernatural taking a role.

Character Creation

Chapter Two of **Mage: The Awakening** lists a number of sample concepts appropriate for Moros characters. This section takes a closer look at each one, examining why they are emblematic of the Necromancers.

• **Thanatologist:** Thanatology is the study of death and dying, especially in their psychological and social aspects. Most Moros, then, are thanatologists post–Awakening, in a sense. Those who choose to focus their magical studies on these matters, or who were thanatologists before coming to walk the Path of Doom, make interesting characters because their work has been put into such perspective. Someone who studies death as a social construct now has access to the spirits of the dead, and can question them as to their experiences on the matter. The Mysterium is the logical place for these Necromancers. Such Moros obviously specialize in Death over Matter, and are likely to learn Fate and possibly Time as well. Important Merits include Resources and Contacts (scientific community, university, even morticians). As for Skills, Academics is a must, and thanatologists are likely to have Computer and Science.

• **Speaker for the dead:** Moros who take this magical path have often witnessed what they perceive as desecrations of the dead or unjustified killings. Such mages take it upon themselves to communicate what ghosts cannot (or will not), help unquiet spirits find peace and, sometimes, take revenge upon killers



or those who would profit from death. The Silver Ladder is probably the most appropriate order for such Moros, though the Adamantine Arrow also makes sense for death-speakers of a more martial bent. The Death Arcanum should obviously be of primary concern, but never to harm or compel the dead. Other Arcana depend on the speaker's motives. Skills include Intimidation, Persuasion and possibly Larceny (for stealing anchors). Danger Sense is a good Merit choice.

• **Modern alchemist:** The Moros who focuses on alchemy isn't necessarily trying to turn lead into gold. He could be a chemical engineer, working with polymers and alloys, or he could be a gemologist (see p. 78 for a discussion of "Sleeper Alchemy" and how the Moros relate to it). Likewise, he might simply be trying to find a way to get rich, letting his Vice of Greed dictate his magical path. Any order can make use of an alchemist for various reasons. The Adamantine Arrow looks for new and interesting weapons, while the Free Council searches for ways to integrate Sleeper science with Awakened magic. Such Moros focus on Matter to the exclusion of Death and are likely to study Forces and probably Prime. Skills include Crafts, Science and Academics. Resources (at low levels, so as to have something to aspire to) and perhaps Artifact or Imbued Item are appropriate Merits.

• **Parapsychologist:** A student of the paranormal is a natural candidate for the Awakening, and one who comes to the Path of Doom probably had an interest in ghosts. That's not the only option, however. Someone studying zombies, perhaps within the voodoo culture, might become a Moros. Likewise, an occultist looking into the various methods of selling or losing one's soul in various cultures might make for an interesting Necromancer. The Mysterium and the Guardians of the Veil are the logical choices of order for these characters. Such Moros naturally learn the Death Arcanum, and probably also Mind. Good Skill choices are Academics, Persuasion or Subterfuge (for interviewing subjects) and Medicine (psychology). Merits include Contacts (people met on travels or others in the same field), Retainers (a grad student) and Fame (perhaps the character had a brief TV spot).

• **Elite assassin:** Sometimes people need to die, whether for justice, political expediency or because they simply know too much. Moros make good assassins because they go into the arrangement with the proper attitude about death (that's the theory, anyway). A Moros assassin might be ex-military, a Borgia-like poisoner or a former serial killer looking to use his talents in service to his order. That order, of course, is commonly the Guardians of the Veil, although the Adamantine Arrow is another possibility. Either of the Path's ruling Arcana are good choices for such a character, and the Life Arcanum is another obvious pick. Skills might include Firearms, Weaponry, Science, Subterfuge, Stealth, Larceny or Socialize, depending on the character's methods. Artifact or Enhanced/Imbued Item (special weapons), Contacts (police/government, because the

character *will* get into trouble sooner or later) and Resources (this line of work pays well) are appropriate Merits, as are any of the Fighting Styles.

• **Leader of a ghostly spy ring:** Ghosts see what the living do; the ghosts just don't always understand it. This Moros seeks to tap into and use the vast amount of secret information to which the dead are privy, perhaps to achieve his order's goals, perhaps to sell. Such Moros might have been intelligence operatives pre–Awakening, or might simply be paranoid enough to want to use the dead before someone else does. Any order would benefit from this sort of Necromancer, though the Guardians and the Silver Ladder are the most obvious choices. Death is obviously the most important Arcanum, with emphasis on empowering (but still controlling) ghosts, and the character probably knows Time, Space and Mind, if only to shield himself from others looking to pinpoint him. Persuasion and Subterfuge are important Skills, and Contacts and Allies are appropriate Merits.

• **Dangerous death cultist:** Whether this character believes in her cult's rhetoric or not, and whether she leads the cult or not, a Moros involved with a dangerous sect can wield a great deal of power. A mage watching from the sidelines as the cult leader whips his followers into a frenzy can fan the flames by animating shadows, raising corpses or summoning ghosts. If the character actually believes in the cult's precepts, she might be operating as a spy in her order (perhaps the cult is made up of Banishers and their followers) or not see her order's or cabal's goals as counter to her cults, at least not yet. Any order might boast a cultist, though the Guardians of the Veil are probably most likely to send a mage to infiltrate one. Death and Mind are the most important Arcana, and Persuasion, Expression and Subterfuge are essential Skills. Merits probably include Retainers or Allies, representing the cult, and many cult leaders have Striking Looks.

• **Euthanasia activist:** The right-to-die movement is a hot topic in many countries, and it holds a special place in the hearts of the Moros. Since the Necromancers know what happens after death (to a point), they often see languishing in pain or in a vegetative state as a horrible curse. A mage who choose to make this issue his passion can usually expect support from others on the Path of Doom, regardless of order, but the Silver Ladder and the Free Council are the best homes for such activists. Death, Fate and Life are important Arcana, used to judge whether a subject is truly ready to die and if destiny doesn't have something yet in store for him. Medicine, Expression and Academics are important Skills, and Contacts (media and medical community) and Fame are appropriate Merits.

• **Inquisitive vivisectionist:** Vivisection is the practice of cutting into living creatures, usually for scientific purposes. A dead body can only tell a researcher so much, of course, but cutting up the living runs into other issues. With magic, however, it is possible to open up a living body, perform whatever research one desires, and then close the cuts as though nothing happened — provided the mage is skilled enough. Then again, not all vivisectionists *care* about the patient surviving the process. A Moros of any order might pursue this disturbing practice, but the natural curiosity necessary is most endemic to the Mysterium. Death and Life are necessary to facilitate vivisection, and Mind helps, too (to help filter out pain and shock). Medicine and Academics are necessary Skills, and Larceny, Firearms, Weaponry and Stealth might be as well depending upon the Necromancer's methods. Such a mage might have any Merit, although Strong Back helps with carrying bodies.

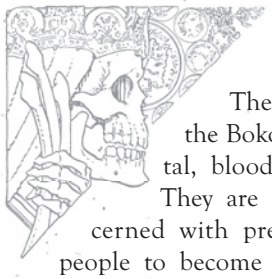
BOKOR

All Moros experience death during their Awakenings. The Path of Doom begins with moving beyond the mortal coil, however briefly. Most Moros feel that death is peaceful, but some see it as rootless, frightening and without direction, a maelstrom of uncertainty and pain. Those are the Moros most likely to become Bokor and command their own armies of the dead.

The Bokor philosophy is fairly simple, but heretical to the rest of the Moros Path. Death is *not* peaceful, say the Bokor, and it is not dignified. It is messy, painful and demeaning. "That last thing a dying man does," say Bokor tutors to their apprentices, "is shit his pants." The Bokor take the Moros attitude of respect and sobriety with a grim smile and a spiteful laugh. But the Bokor are not tricksters or jesters. They want power, and they feel that the bodies of the dead provide a good path to that power.

The word "*bokor*" is used in the Vodoun faith to refer to a priest or shaman who performs black magic, often for money. *Bokor* are considered responsible for the "zombie powder" that changes a living person into an unliving servant, as well as other well-known maleficent aspects of Vodoun. Curses that bring disease and bad luck, dolls made to resemble the person a *bokor* wants to harm and the entreaty of spirits to bedevil the *bokor*'s enemies have all been laid at the feet of these individuals. To what extent did the Bokor Legacy influence these legends? The answer is lost to time, but it is true that the Legacy is strongest in Haiti and other Caribbean nations where some form of Vodoun is in common practice.

There is no rest.
No rest for me, who has seen the Leaden Tower and heard the whispers of the Shades.



The arts of the Bokor are brutal, bloody and effective. They are primarily concerned with preparing living people to become zombies upon death, and with creating these zombies. The Bokor do not, as a rule, care whose bodies they animate. To the Bokor, a person ceases to be a person at the instant of death. The soul departs, and all that is left is matter. That matter can then be animated, given power and tasks. As the Bokor grow in power, they can gain the ability to kill with a glance, and a potent member of this Legacy may kill a man and turn him into a zombie before his body hits the ground.

The Bokor's method of raising a body to service involves nothing more than a glance or a whispered invocation, at least outwardly. Inwardly, however, the Bokor thinks of himself as a king of the dead, able to stride the worlds of the living and the deceased by dint of the Awakening. Raising a body as a zombie, therefore, is no different than calling an obedient dog. While some Bokor take the time to paint corpses with glyphs (often in blood or wet flour) in order to ensure that their service continues longer than an hour or so, others rely on their skill alone to create lasting servants.

Despite the Bokor's blasé attitude about corpses, the Bokor refuse to have any truck with ghosts. The Bokor believe that ghosts are fragments of human souls, and that by helping a ghost to move on (by destroying its anchors or severing its connection to them) the Bokor can help the soul to repair itself. If a Bokor discovers that a ghost is anchored to its own corpse, the Bokor will never raise that corpse as a zombie (though the mage might destroy it). A soul is whole at the moment of death, however, and powerful Bokor can stop the soul from fleeing and bind it back into its now-dead body. This creates a powerful undead creature called a revenant, capable of much more independent and complex action than a standard zombie. Creating a revenant, however, is the only way in which a Bokor feels comfortable affecting a human soul. Severing or holding a soul in an object is taboo to them. This differentiates them with the *bokor* of Vodoun, who are infamous for placing souls in clay jars called *canari tonnerre* and using them to force the souls' barely living bodies into service.

Every Bokor has her own grandiose dreams of power. This might involve conquest of a particular area, slaying all the descendants of an enemy or acquisition of wealth, but the goal is very rarely "magical knowledge." The Bokor are unabashedly physical and greedy, and look down on such lofty ideals as wisdom and humility. Unlike their parent Path, they do not see the fragility of life as a call to greater moral and behavioral rectitude. On the contrary, the Bokor see that life is short and death is uncertain, and so they take what they want, using the undead as their foot soldiers, mules and assassins.

Parent Path: Moros (the Bokor Legacy is not taught outside the Path)

Nickname: Slave-driver

Appearance: Most Bokor are of Caribbean descent. They tend to be thin and sallow, and, unlike most Moros, their clothes are usually ratty and ill-kept. They laugh easily, but this laughter lacks any real mirth. Indeed, they don't take true joy out of anything in life, though they drown themselves in creature comforts as often as possible.

Background: Again, many Bokor come from Haiti or other areas in which Vodoun is practiced, but some come to the Legacy without ever so much as hearing the word "voodoo." Bokor obviously tend to lean toward the violent and morbid side of the Moros Path, and Necromancers who specialize in Matter seldom take on the Legacy. Most Bokor are control freaks of the highest degree, reveling in their power over the dead.

Organization: Bokor don't take orders well, and so they are quite likely to sever ties with their tutors before attaining mastery of the Legacy (which is just as well, considering how truly dangerous the third Attainment of the Legacy is). That said, part of the process for taking on an apprentice involves both parties swearing an oath never to harm the other by direct or indirect action. Since Bokor focus on their goal, whatever it may be, there isn't a great deal of communication between members.

No rest for my enemies, whom you will meet soon enough.

Suggested Oblations: Giving orders (and having them followed), preparing a body for burial (only to steal it later), painting a body with glyphs, dissection

Concepts: Dilettante, disgruntled *houngan*, former soldier, mercenary, gourmand, blackmailer

Attainments

The Bokor naturally study the Arcanum of Death, as well as the principles of Space (useful when keeping tabs an army of zombies or on one specific foe). A firm background in Occult is necessary for this Legacy.

1st: Bokor's Mark

Prerequisites: Gnosis 3, Death 2 (primary), Space 1, Occult 3

The mage places a curse on a target, putting her soul to sleep. This has no dramatic effect, but makes the target fade into the background. Others don't notice her as easily — they might push past her in lines or forget that she is there in conversation. In addition, the Bokor can always find those he has marked. Bokor typically use this power on people they intend to kill and turn into zombies or revenants.

The Bokor must touch the target to plant the Mark. This Attainment produces an effect similar to the Death 2 spell "Suppress Aura" (see p. 137 of **Mage: The Awakening**). The target does not exhibit an aura, just as if she were a zombie. While Sleepers, of course, cannot sense this change, they do notice it inasmuch as the target is easy to overlook. Social rolls made by the target receive a –2 modifier. Also, the Bokor has a perfect sense of where the target is after she leaves his presence, as the Space 1 "Finder" spell (see p. 233 of **Mage: The Awakening**). The Mark lasts for one day, though if the mage has Space 2 or easy access to the target he can reactivate it as necessary.

Optional Arcanum: Mind 2

If the mage also knows Mind 2, the Bokor's Mark carries with it feelings of lethargy, depression and apathy. This effect is similar to the Mind 2 spell "Emotional Urging" (see pp. 207–208 of **Mage: The Awakening**).

2nd: Call to Service

Prerequisites: Gnosis 5, Death 3

With a glance, the Bokor can turn a human corpse into a zombie servant. This works in a similar fashion to the Death 3 "Quicken Corpse" spell (see pp. 140–141 of **Mage: The Awakening**). The player must roll Presence + Occult + Death to raise the zombie and divide successes to empower the servant as detailed in the spell description. Zombies raised by Bokor are always considered "indestructible," that is, they do not have a specific vulnerability that destroys them instantly.

These zombies are also impossible to "steal" from the Bokor. Another mage might attempt to use the Death Arcanum to wrest control of these undead minions away from the Bokor, but because the animation is based on an Attainment and not a spell, this is not possible. A Bokor's minions belong to him until they are destroyed or until the Bokor releases them. Also, if the Bokor encounters zombies raised by other mages or by other phenomena, he can attempt to bring them under his control. The roll is still Presence + Occult + Death, and is either a contested action (if the zombies belong to another mage) or an instant action (if the zombies have arisen through some other supernatural means).

Bokor-raised zombies last for the usual duration unless the player adds Duration factors into the roll or the Bokor inscribes the bodies with Atlantean glyphs. Zombies inscribed with glyphs do not rot. If the glyphs are destroyed, the zombie remains animated, but only for the remainder of the scene.

Optional Arcanum: Mind 3

If the mage also knows Mind 3, she is able to mentally attack others in her line of sight, causing horrible pain but leaving the body intact (so as to raise it as a zombie when the unfortunate person dies). This effect is similar to the Mind 3 spell "Psychic Assault" (see p. 212 of **Mage: The Awakening**). The player rolls Presence + Occult + Mind. The target must be in sensory range; this Attainment cannot be used sympathetically. Even so, the Bokor must have a sympathetic connection to the target. A sample of blood, hair, skin, a photograph or a physical representation of the target (such as a doll) are all acceptable. Any successes are inflicted as bashing damage.

Also, the mage can use the Mind 3 spell "Multi-Tasking" to raise more than one zombie with the Call to Service Attainment without using Target factors (but not for any other magical or Attainment-related reason).

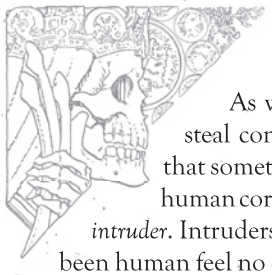
3rd: Bokor's Chain

Prerequisites: Gnosis 7, Death 4, Occult 4 or Occult 3 with a Specialty (Undead)

The Bokor can now change a dead human into a revenant (as the Death 4 "Revenant" spell; see p. 143 of **Mage: The Awakening**) as an instant action, provided the subject has not been dead more than one hour. The action is still contested. The player rolls Presence + Occult + Death, while the Storyteller rolls the subject's Resolve + Gnosis. If the subject wins, the soul flies free and the Bokor cannot create a revenant, though she can still raise the body as a zombie. If the Bokor wins, the soul is locked into its now-dead shell, becoming a revenant, as detailed in the spell description. Bokor normally instill Passions such as "Serve me faithfully" in their revenants, but sometimes choose Passions that further their goals, such as "Obtain and hoard wealth" or "Kill the family of (the Bokor's enemy)."

The Bokor can empower the revenant, spending Mana to grant the revenant Essence or even Willpower on a one-for-one basis. The revenant lasts until destroyed or the Bokor releases it.

And no rest for you, my friend, for death has delivered you into my service. Rise up, now.



As with zombies, the Bokor can attempt to steal control of other revenants. Note, however, that sometimes non-human spirits take control of a human corpse, becoming a type of revenant called an *intruder*. Intruders are vicious and alien, and, never having been human feel no compassion or sympathy for humanity at all. The Bokor have no power over these creatures, and hate and fear them more than little else.

Optional Arcanum: Mind 4

If the mage also knows Mind 4, his Psychic Assault now delivers lethal damage (though the notes on range and sympathetic connection still apply). In addition, the mage learns to control the living as well as the dead, up to a point. This effect is similar to the Mind 4 spell "Telepathic Control" (see p. 216 of **Mage: The Awakening**). This Attainment can only be used on targets within sensory range, and cannot be used to force targets into tasks inimical to their nature. The Attainment requires an instant and contested action. The player rolls Presence + Occult + Mind, while the target resists with a reflexive Resolve + Gnosis roll. If the Bokor wins, the target is compelled to follow the Bokor's mental commands for the remainder of the scene (for Sleepers; mages are only subject to a single turn of domination). While the mage cannot force targets to commit suicide, he can force them into dangerous situations by giving them commands that aren't immediately harmful. "Walk across the street" isn't dangerous in itself, but if the street is a busy highway, then the command is much more sinister.

Moros Characters

Alchemist

Quote: *Oh, you can keep that one. It's only a one-carat, anyway.*

Background: Her courtship, the proposal, the engagement parties, the ceremony — it was all like a wonderful dream. Dreams end, of course, and for her the end was truly crushing. He went for cigarettes their first night of honeymoon, but never returned. All she found was a note that he'd left with the front desk, explaining why he was leaving. She went back to the room and swallowed 20 pills and a gallon of champagne, and prepared for her next dream.

It never came. She saw light in the distance, but noticed that her shadow fell to her right, rather than behind her, as though there was another source of light she couldn't see. She followed that one instead, and found herself walking on a beach made of diamonds. She picked some up, but they fell through her fingers like water, and so she walked on to the tower in the distance.

Description: Now in the late 30s, her face has lost most of the bitterness of her betrayal, but it comes out in her laugh. Her fingers are usually stained with charcoal, smelling of lead or copper or whatever materials she was working with that day, and her hair is usually pulled back into a ponytail.

Storytelling Hints: Dabbling only rarely in the Death Arcanum, her first love is Matter, specifically metal and stone. She is an expert metallurgist and jeweler, and carries a small pouch of diamonds as a dedicated tool her for magic. In her heart, she still loves her husband and wants to know his fate, even if she can't share it.

Abilities:

Metallurgy (dice pool 7) — She knows more about metalworking and the science of galvanization than most engineers, and, if given time and equipment, can forge incredibly strong alloys.

Gemology (dice pool 8) — She is experienced in identifying, cleaning and setting precious gemstones, and can make beautiful jewelry with the right equipment.

Ambassador to the Dead

Quote: *They'll let you know if they aren't happy, trust me.*

Background: He was the youngest boy in a large family, and grew up surrounded by brothers, sisters and cousins. When the fever hit, though, his parents refused to seek medical treatment, believing that God would cure the children if that was His will. Apparently, it wasn't, because not only did most of the children die, but the fever took his parents, uncles and aunts away as well. In the space of a year, he went from never having a moment's privacy to be completely alone.

Not completely, though. The ghosts of his parents spoke first, begging for forgiveness. The ghosts of some of the other nearby kids who had died of the disease piped up next, asking for some of their favorite toys to be buried with them. He isn't sure exactly which spirit it was that pointed him toward the Watchtower of the Lead Coin, but what he learned there only reinforced what he already knew — our obligations to one another don't end with death.

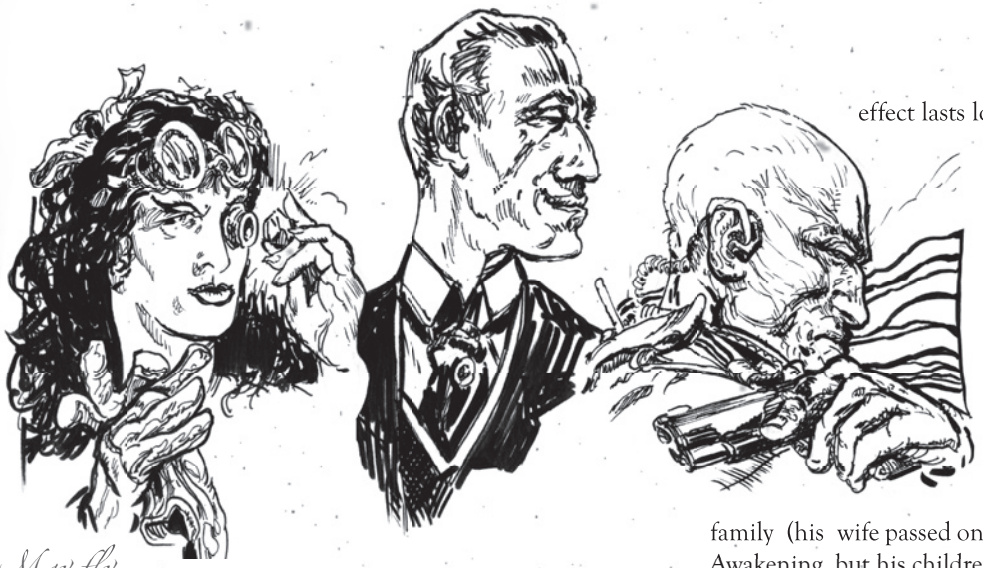
Description: Now in his late teens, the Ambassador is tall, sallow and reserved. He dresses and moves as though he's always at a dinner party (or funeral), as he never knows who's watching and doesn't want to look like a slob. He's a complete neat freak, and doesn't like leaving knickknacks or loose objects around, just in case a poltergeist comes calling.

Storytelling Hints: The Ambassador might belong to any order, and can fulfill his role as a speaker to (and for) the dead no matter what his place in Awakened society. He is polite and reserved, and doesn't like to argue, because he knows people remember slights and insults no matter how minor or unintentional. His dour manner belies a gregarious nature, though; he loves to talk, be it with the living or the dead.

Abilities:

Persuasion (dice pool 6) — It might take him a while to get going, but the Ambassador is a charmer.

Awareness (dice pool 8) — Always looking out for an ambush from opponents he can't see, the Ambassador is extremely hard to surprise.



Mayfly

Quote: *It could be tomorrow for me. It's tonight for you.*

Background: Arnold William Walker never considered himself an evil or cruel man. He was Christian, and devout enough. He gave to charities, married a nice girl he met in college, fathered a couple of kids, and one night was sitting in his den when they thought occurred to him, *I am just waiting to die now.*

The fact that he suffered a massive stroke a split second later might be coincidence or a sick cosmic joke. His kids out with their friends and his wife already asleep, no one could help him. He lay on the floor struggling to stand for a few moments before his body gave up. His soul, however, had other ideas. Winging its way to the Supernal Realm of Stygia, Arnold saw souls flying around him in a mad whirl of chaos. He flew to the top of the Watchtower of the Lead Coin and inscribed his name there with his favorite gold pen, and awoke in his den, hands cold, left side of his body numb, but alive.

Arnold did not leave his family as he began his journey down the Path of Doom, even though the cabal that found him advised it. He was initiated into the Guardians of the Veil because he was so good at remaining unnoticed, but finding something that fit Arnold's talents was difficult. Strangely, though, they discovered that he had a knack for murder.

The image of the swirling souls had never left Arnold, and after his Awakening, he had become aware of the fleeting nature of human life. The only difference between the mayfly that lives a few hours and the human who lives a few decades is a matter of scale. Arnold took the name "Mayfly," and went on to become one of the Guardians' finest and most subtle assassins.

Description: Mayfly is a quiet man in his late 50s. He dresses in casual clothes and, unlike many Moros, refuses to dress in any fashion reminiscent of mourning. What little remains of his hair is gray and wisp thin, and the left side of his face still droops a bit from the stroke. He almost always wears a jacket and complains of the cold, but in truth, he uses the pockets to carry various powders and poisons.

His nimbus causes an unsettling numbness in hands and feet, tingling and dull. Sometimes this harmless but frightening effect lasts long after the spell is through.

Storytelling Hints: It isn't that human life doesn't *matter* to Mayfly, it's just that if someone dies today as opposed to 40 years from now, the world doesn't change enough on a grand scale to merit much upheaval. Mayfly is well aware, however, that an individual's death makes quite a difference to those nearest her. The fact that he still has living family (his wife passed on in her sleep a few years after his Awakening, but his children are grown now, and starting their own families) and yet makes a career out of ending lives, gnaws at him when he stops to think about it. He often resolves these doubts, however, with the notion that he will be held accountable for his actions when his own life ends, and cannot be fully taken to task before that time.

Dedicated Magical Tool: Small hand mirror framed in platinum

Real Name: Arnold Walker
Path: Moros
Order: Guardians of the Veil
Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 3
Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2
Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 3
Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer 1, Crafts 2, Medicine (Poison) 2, Occult (Afterlife) 2, Science (Chemistry) 3
Physical Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 1, Larceny 1, Stealth* 3
Social Skills: Empathy 2, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 2
Merits: Destiny (Bane: Insects) 2, Order Status: Guardians of the Veil 3, Resources 3
Willpower: 6
Wisdom: 4 (Depression, 5)
Virtue: Faith
Vice: Envy
Initiative: 7
Defense: 3
Speed: 10
Health: 7
Gnosis: 2
Arcana: Death 3, Life 2, Matter 3
Rotes: *Death* — Corpse Mask (••), Suppress Own Life (•••); *Life* — Sense Life (•), Body Control (••), Self-Healing (••); *Matter* — Transmute Water (••), Unseen Aegis (••)
Mana/per turn: 11/2
Armor: 3 ("Unseen Aegis," Matter ••)



OBRIMOS
Path of the Mighty

The hulking demon paused in its pursuit as Glorianna stopped and turned to face it. The ancient chamber was a dead-end. Hopefully not literally, she thought to herself.

"You've led a merry chase, little one," the creature sneered at her, forked tongue licking its lips, "but the game is over. Your sky-magic is of no use here, down in the depths of my home. No ray of light, no celestial fire, will come to aid you. Pray now to whatever gods you honor."

"I don't pray for salvation, demon," she said in an iron tone that belied her slight build, "and if you want to finish me, you're going to need more than words to do it."

Her taunt had the desired effect. With a roar, the demon lunged through the doorway of the chamber at the young woman only a few steps away. Just across the threshold, one foot fell on the metal wires hidden in the layer of dust on the floor.

The demon's scream echoed in the dank underground chambers as crackling blue-white fire ran all along the frame of the doorway, pinning the creature there, writhing in agony. A sharp smell of ozone and burning filled the air as the demon thrashed, arcs of lightning running across the doorway like a Jacob's ladder.

Then the light and the scream died away, and the smoldering body hit the floor at Glorianna's feet, acrid smoke rising from the charred flesh. She crouched down, chambering a silver-etched cold iron round into the auto-mag and pressing the barrel against the back of the distended skull.

"I make my own lightning," Glorianna said. Then she pulled the trigger.



Those who have been given knowledge see that what is revealed unto thee from thy Lord is the truth and leadeth unto the Path of the Mighty . . .
— The Qur'an 34:7

Introduction

They are the chosen ones, to whom the Invisible Truth is revealed in one shining moment of glory. They call the celestial power of the Heavens down to Earth. They are conduits to the divine. They are the Obrimos, Theurgists who walk the Path of the Mighty.

Although some see them as zealots, the Obrimos understand the true meaning of divine inspiration, for they have risen above the Fallen World and seen the truth. Now their duty is to bring the light of truth down into the darkness of mundane life, to light the way and to stand watch against the forces that would see the light snuffed out forever.

Theme: Strength

"Obrimos" means "mighty" in Greek and, true to its name, the Path of the Mighty is associated with the Tarot card Strength in the Major Arcana. Strength — of body, mind, spirit and character — is the key theme of the Obrimos. The Path of the Mighty does not get its name merely from the power invested in the chosen. To be one of the chosen and to walk the Path, you have to have great strength right from the very beginning.

Many outsiders think "strength" means the bluster and pride they associate with Theurgists, but strength is just as often a quiet and unassuming quality. Strength is not just physical endurance, but the spiritual fortitude and resolve to go on when all else seems hopeless, to set aside preconceptions and embrace new truths, to do what needs to be done when no one else is willing or able to step up. It is the humble strength that comes from faith, and, in the hands of the Theurgists, it is a power that can literally move mountains.

Strength comes with tempering, and Theurgists are tempered in the Supernal Fires of Creation, the forge that is the Realm of Aether. The experience of Awakening is transcendent to them, but also a trial, and Obrimos mystery plays are often tests of faith and understanding before the newly chosen place their names alongside the others in the Watchtower of the Golden Key.

In some systems of Tarot, the Strength card is known as "Lust," but it is not mere animal passion: it is the lust for the divine, for the Invisible Truth of the Supernal World. This desire drives all Theurgists, to regain that transcendent moment of oneness they knew or sensed when they Awakened and placed their names beside those of their fellow chosen. Indeed, the strength of the Obrimos helps them to control their base and animal natures, to tame the beast and leash it to the cause of the higher self.

Although the chosen are willing to use force when necessary, strength does not always involve force. Strength is also a matter of harmony with one's self and one's purpose. Theurgists seek this divine oneness, with their destiny, their calling — their *dharma* or true will, as some call it. When moving in harmony with such universal forces, the mage is as inexorable as the tides, as unstoppable as the march of time.

Of course, strength does not always come with wisdom, and Theurgists have been known to apply their strength at times when a more subtle approach would be better. This is when they also misunderstand the nature of their Path. Strength, properly and patiently applied, can accomplish great things, but it is also a destructive force. Clumsy or misguided applications of power result in tragedy, so following the Path of the Mighty involves learning the proper uses of one's own strength, before it is too late.

Mood: Hope

Although Theurgists wield great power, their greatest strength is the power of hope. Awakening to the celestial glory of the Aether grants Theurgists a vision of what can be, and that vision helps to sustain them through the greatest trials. Born into a world of darkness, they are shown the light, lifted up above the Fallen World.

Although the momentary oneness and the glimpse of the Invisible Truth slips away just as quickly as it came, the Obrimos are left with the promise and potential of finding it once again. The Golden Key that is the sign of their Watchtower opens the doorways of perception and unlocks the gates of the Path to reach the Invisible Truth. The Key, a symbol of hope, is the birthright of every Theurgist. It is the potential inherent in their Awakening.

The chosen also bring the light of hope into the darkness of despair. They serve as shining beacons to those in need. For some Theurgists, hope is born of deep and abiding faith: in the divine, in the natural order or in the potential within all humanity (or some measure of all three). For others, hope stems from an unshakable will and a drive to succeed, no matter what the obstacle. There are more than a few Obrimos who place their hopes in themselves: that they can find the truth, awaken the Sleepers, slay the monsters and save the world.

Theurgists vary in terms of hopefulness, of course, from wide-eyed and utterly unshakable faith to cynical awareness that the world is going to Hell in a handbasket, but at least

they've been given the power to *do* something about it, even if only to affects things on a small scale. The Obrimos believe in a better world; they have to, because they've been there and seen the potential for themselves.

The other side of hope is fear: the possibility things won't turn out as you hope, that your hopes are wrong or in vain. Obrimos are keenly aware of the stakes in the drama played out in the Fallen World. To them, humanity is already condemned to the Hell of the Quiescence, unable to see the Truth, Sleeping away their lives, but there are things with even worse fates planned for the world. Some say the Obrimos are fear-based, alarmist, seeing enemies in every shadow and doom on the horizon. The chosen say they are willing to stand and face the darkness rather than surrender to it, or hide from the truth. Their strength and faith must be unshakable, since they may be the world's last hope.

History

The history of the Obrimos since the kindling of the Supernal Flame atop the Watchtower of the Golden Key is one of honor, glory, sacrifice, pride and blood. Their history is the history of the heights and the depths of the human soul and of those chosen to walk the Path of the Mighty.

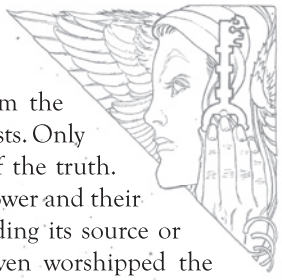
In the Beginning . . .

. . . there was the darkness and silence and the void of the endless Abyss, yawning gulf between the Supernal and Fallen Worlds. Humanity huddled together in fear amidst the fallen ruins of the Atlantean Ladder, afraid of the night. Then from out of the darkness came the Light. Out of the darkness came the rolling thunder of the Word. Out of the darkness came the Supernal Fire of Creation, shining from high atop the Watchtower of the Golden Key.

The Supernal Light was a beacon to those who raised their eyes toward Heaven, showing them the way to a higher calling. Those who truly saw the light and followed it were the first to walk the Path of the Mighty and place their names upon the rolls of the Golden Spire. They were the first of the chosen, the shining host of the mighty, the Obrimos.

The first Obrimos had much work ahead of them. With the shattering of the Atlantean Ladder and the creation of the Abyss, the Fallen World was set adrift, hopeless. The Theurgists brought light back into the darkness. With sword of fire and spear of thunder, they drove back the creatures of the night and carved out safe enclaves for the Theurgists' people. These Theurgists sheltered the precious flame of truth and wisdom, passing on their insights and visions in stories, songs and texts.

The chosen sought to guide the Sleepers in their fallen dreams, as the light of the Watchtower had called them to Awaken. Unfortunately, the Quiescence blinded the Sleepers' eyes, and they turned away from the enlightenment offered by the Theurgists. Only a rare few Sleepers saw a glimmer of the truth. The rest knew only of the chosen's power and their wonder-working, without understanding its source or meaning. They respected, feared, even worshipped the chosen, but did not understand. The Obrimos did what they could to show Sleepers the way, to light their path, but in so doing sometimes stumbled themselves.



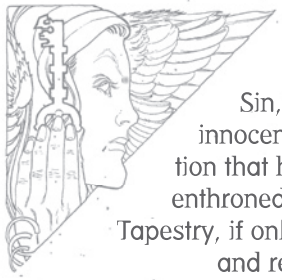
In trying to simplify the truth, creating allegories for the Sleepers, some Obrimos confused their stories with the greater truth. Some Sleepers offered Theurgists their worship, and Obrimos sometimes accepted it; pride replaced humble service to a higher calling. Some Obrimos, filled with power from on high, swelled with the worship and the devotion of their followers, imposed their will on others, supposedly for their own good. The chosen learned the lesson of the War in Heaven many times over: pride goeth before a fall.

Ancient tales and legends speak of an Age when the first of the Mighty worked to rebuild what was lost with shining Atlantis. They guided the Sleepers wisely and well, serving as oracles and seers interpreting visions of the Supernal World. They anointed kings and solemnized sacred unions, blessed babes and raised them to respect the higher Realms. They were champions of light against the forces preying upon the Sleepers. They raised strongholds and rose on the winds of the Aether to the Golden Watchtower to bring back what they learned.

Still, the Supernal Light cast long shadows in the Fallen World, and the Abyss yawned wide, waiting for the one misstep it took for one of the chosen to slip and fall. The hearts and minds of the Sleepers grew cold and dark as the Quiescence spread, and the Obrimos were forced to hide their light under a bushel, to become Servants of the Secret Fire, kept burning in their hearts and in their sanctums, but not shown to others for fear that the cold wind of their Disbelief would snuff it out forever. The arts of Atlantis became the *Ars Mysteriorum*, sacred mysteries handed down from master to apprentice, hidden from the world until the time was right.

The Fall From Grace

Obrimos recall the shattering of the Atlantean Ladder as the Fall of humanity from a state of grace, although different mystic orders, Legacies and sects see the Fall in different ways. To some, the Fall was a just punishment for the hubris of attempting to storm the gates of Heaven and become as gods. For others, the Fall was the opposite: the unjust exile of humanity's godlike spirits, imprisoned in the Fallen World by the jealous Exarchs. Some see it as a sign of Original



Sin, the loss of humanity's primal innocence and purity, others an indication that humanity has a special destiny, enthroned above all other beings in the Tapestry, if only we can overcome our jailers and reclaim our birthright.

Whatever the case — and the truth is a hotly debated topic among Theurgists — Obrimos largely agree that both humanity and the Awakened are not what they once were. The Obrimos see the Fallen World as just that: less than the ideal of the Supernal Realm, imperfect, broken. This tends to go hand-in-hand with many Obrimos attitudes: rejection of the material world, denial of the physical and a focus on intellectual and spiritual matters. Even Theurgists such as the Perfected Adepts, who concentrate a great deal on the body, tend to reject the entanglements of the mundane world such as material possessions and social ties.

Other mages say this dismissive attitude toward the Fallen World makes the Obrimos shortsighted: willing to sacrifice the here-and-now for the promise of something better on a higher plane, able to treat both the Fallen World and people in it as if they aren't entirely real. These mages also point out how this shortsightedness tends to make fanatical Theurgists even more dangerous: if the Fallen World truly is "tainted" and the ultimate goal is existence beyond it, then there is little the wild-eyed fanatic won't risk to achieve his goals — even the destruction of the corrupt world and everyone in it.

For their part, Theurgists say they are focused on higher goals. After all, the inheritors of Atlantis agree there *was* a Fall and that the Fallen World is a part of the Lie concealing the Invisible Truth from them. So why should they get caught up in it? For the most contemplative members of the Path, even the power of the Arcana is merely a "sideshow," *siddhis,* miraculous by-products of the mage's enlightenment. They warn that becoming too fascinated with the use of such power is merely another trap of the Lie, the same one that led to the original Fall, in fact.

Myths of the Fall

Myth often carries the weight of faith with Theurgists, so the Obrimos are cautious about what myths they propagate, stressing how these ancient legends are just that, legends, tales passed down since the time before time. The first of these is also perhaps the most disturbing for the chosen, because it casts some doubt on the divine nature of their Path. Obrimos of the Free Council, however, have seen a spark of Truth in this ancient tale in recent years.

The Eye of Heaven

The Oracle of the Obrimos retreated into darkness from the battles with the Exarchs, the Path lit by the burning shards of the Great Ladder as they fell streaming from the sky to the Earth below. The Oracle did not Fall with the Ladder, but caught hold of something in the firmament, a fixed star in the blackness of the Heavens.

That star was as a silver wheel, and its turning was that of a gear, raising the Oracle up and over, out of the darkness and back down into a deeper mystery. The corridor into which the silver gear emerged was lined with endless turning wheels and spindles of gold, silver and glass, making an endless whirring chorus of celestial music.

"What is this place?" the Oracle asked, for it was like no part of the Celestial City ever seen before.

"Behind, between," a voice whispered from the shadows of the gears, as something scuttled past on many clicking legs, "machine."

"Inside, above, below," another voice responded, and, as the Oracle paced the corridor, a chorus of voices became audible, whispering secret names, and words and ciphers, leading the way toward great doors of beaten gold, engraved with sigils and figures that seemed to march across their surface in an endless procession.

The Oracle tried to read them, but the symbols moved too fast, scrolling out of sight before their meaning could be grasped.

"Within, without," the voices whispered. "Inside-out."

The Oracle grasped the handles of the great doors. They were warm to the touch.

"Before, between, sights unseen."

The doors were not locked and opened at the Oracle's urging. Light, pure and blinding and powerful, poured like golden honey from those portals. It made the air around the Oracle buzz and there was the sound of distant thunder, voices rising to a crescendo.

"Was, is, can-be, I see, eye see, Eye see . . . "

The voices were drowned out in a peal of thunder as the Oracle beheld the great burning eye at the center of the light, and the eye looked, and through it the Oracle saw, and heard, and felt, and knew and became.

A fire burned bright from the summit of the Watchtower of the Golden Key, and, to the people of the Fallen World, it was as if the stars doubled in their intensity and a new bright star was born in the Heavens above, flashing its brilliance across the whole of the world. Those who raised their eyes from the Fallen World toward the Eye of Heaven, in that moment, they too, saw, and heard, and felt and knew — and became.



Was the legendary Oracle of the Obrimos simply lucky enough to fall into the mechanistic innards of Creation and find the insight to light the signal fires of the Watchtower of the Golden Key? Is the divine truth of Aether nothing more than a cosmic wind-up toy operating pulleys and levers behind the curtains of reality? Some Obrimos scoff at this tale for its simplicity and a portrayal of their Realm that none of them have ever experienced. Others counter that is because the Oracle is the only one to have entered Aether from the *other* side, "inside-out" as the voices spoke. What all the chosen have seen since is no more than a façade, concealing the Truth.

Some Free Council Obrimos have taken a more modern and scientific position on this story. They say the images of a clockwork god-machine behind the veils of reality are an allegory for the true nature of the Tapestry. Can't Creation be considered a "machine" of sorts? Perhaps the experience of the Oracle was a direct communion with or understanding of the Implicate Order of things, and that vast and cosmic order was perceived in terms of a machine or mechanism. This makes it no less divine or wondrous, and the exaltation of the Obrimos no less meaningful, but does call into question their right to judge. If they were chosen by no more than a quirk of fate, who are they to decide truth for others?

The Gift of Fire

In the nights that followed the fall of the Atlantean Ladder, the children of the Earth huddled in the darkness, afraid of what lurked in the shadows. Horrors stalked the night unbound, with only a few gifted souls able to guard against their coming with rites and words and signs of protection. But the Awakened were too few to guard the Sleepers, and their sleep became an endless nightmare.

From the Supernal Realms, the Oracles saw the fear and suffering of the people, and they sought to aid the people, each in their own way. The Oracle of the Lead Coin showed the people iron and silver and ways to forge them into weapons able to drive off the monsters. The Oracle of the Iron Gauntlet gave the people visions, sending omens to warn when the monsters drew near. The Oracle of the Lunargent Thorn gave the people stories and songs, so they could tell each other of the dangers lurking in the dark and how to fight them. The Oracle of the Stone Book bid good spirits to visit the people, giving them allies and helpers.

These gifts aided the children of Earth, but these gifts were not enough. From the Realm of Aether, the Oracle of the Golden Key looked down upon the Earth and saw how the people struggled, heard their prayers for salvation and aid against the nightmares of the Fallen World, felt how they struggled against the darkness and knew what must be done.

The Oracle plunged a brand deep into the Supernal Fire, the burning source of Creation, then descended the spiraling steps of the great tower, to find the other four Oracles arrayed, and waiting.

"Where do you bear this torch?" asked the Oracle of the Iron Gauntlet.

"To the Fallen World, to light the way of the people."

"It is forbidden," said the Oracle of the Lead Coin.

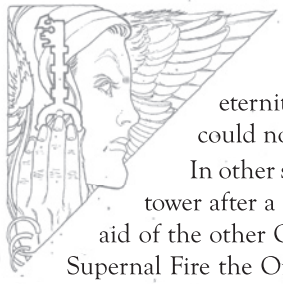
"To tread the Fallen World," the Oracle of the Lunargent Thorn said, "you must cross the Abyss, and risk the wrath of the Exarchs and the Fallen Ones."

"Offer another gift," said the Oracle of the Stone Book. "Send your wisdom in dreams and visions, as we have done."

But the Oracle of the Golden Key would not be swayed, so the four stood aside and the Torchbearer passed from the tower, crossing the Bridge of Swords, carrying the Supernal Fire down into the Fallen World.

The fires kindled from that flame drove back the darkness, illuminated the night. They made forges for smelting and hammering the weapons of iron and silver. They gave smoke for the visions and omens. They were gathering places for sharing stories, and tales, and wisdom, and they were gateways and beacons for the good spirits, allies of the children of Earth.

In some versions of the tale, the Obrimos Oracle pays a heavy price for bringing the gift of fire: unable to return to the lofty Supernal Realms, the Oracle is captured and bound — some say by the Exarchs, others by the acamoth — forced to suffer an



eternity of torment for all the nightmares they could no longer inflict upon the Sleepers.

In other stories, the Oracle returns to the Watchtower after a harrowing journey, sometimes with the aid of the other Oracles or even mortals armed with the Supernal Fire the Oracle brought them. In a telling among initiations of an Ascensionist Legacy (see p. 125), the Oracle perishes in the Fallen World, but another takes up the torch and returns across the gulf of the Abyss to the Golden Spire, so there will always be an Oracle there, lighting the way.

To the Obrimos, this tale emphasizes the importance of service to a higher cause, even at great personal cost. Mages of other Paths just mutter about martyr complexes, grandstanding and how the Theurgists manage to smoothly combine humility with a claim of preeminence among the inheritors of Atlantis.

Candles in the Dark

The modern history of the Path of the Mighty has been likened to carrying a lantern down a long, dark road, or sheltering a flickering candle in a storm. The Obrimos have been keepers of the flame of truth and enlightenment for as long as they can recount, throughout the darkest epochs of history.

Theirs has always been a secret guardianship, keeping the flame alive in mystery traditions, underground cults, family legacies passed down across the generations and inner initiations of worldly religions. Such secrecy is necessary in the face of the Quiescence, but may also contribute the idea among the Obrimos — and the Awakened in general — that the Obrimos are the chosen ones. The pride that comes with being set above mundane humanity has often been their undoing.

The Ancient World

In the ancient world, the Obrimos kept their eyes focused on the Heavens. They were astrologers, mathematicians, priests and diviners. They unraveled the mysteries of the Fallen World through reason and intuition, and brought through the wisdom of the Supernal World in visions and prophecy. The Theurgists found their apprentices in the temples and lyceums, initiates who likewise turned their eyes upward and saw the light. So the term "enlightenment" became known among Sleepers, from the first visions of the Supernal Light of the Aether.

Of course, the Obrimos were not solely scholars. Many wielded their powers in defense of truth or for causes of their own. They found acolytes and enlightenment through warrior mystery cults devoted to shining heroes such as Horus, the Avenger of His Father, and Mithras, the Reborn Sun. They guided generals and armies to victory, bringing down walls and shattering strongholds. They hunted monsters and defended the people against dangers that became legendary, their truths fading into the mists of time and the Lie.

One True Light?

There is considerable debate whether the world has the Theurgists to thank (or blame, as the case may be) for the rise of monotheism in Western civilization. Certainly, monotheist religions, from the Cult of Aten in Egypt to Zoroastrianism to the Israelites, and later Christianity, focused on the celestial realm and upon the light of Heaven, either literally or figuratively.

In these and other faiths, the Obrimos see reflections of the Supernal Fire of Creation, although none truly capture it in all its majesty and wonder. Some of the visions and sermons of ancient prophets match those of the Path of the Mighty. How many of those desert prophets and priests left their true names carved upon the Watchtower of the Golden Key, trying to tell others what they saw? None can say for certain.

What is known is that Theurgists Awakened among the faithful of these and other religions. Their visions of a celestial realm guided some to see the light of the Aether, calling it Aten, or Paradise or Heaven. Most found masters to teach them (or, more rightly, their masters found them and showed them the way). At first, these Obrimos were few, members of scattered mystery cults as they had been for untold generations.

Then Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire, and two branches of the Path of the Mighty came together. The enlightened scholars, scribes and sages of Rome, Greece and Egypt, hidden within the cults of Hermes and Thoth, blended with the priests and prophets of the Israelites and Christians. The rise of the Catholic Church in Rome became inexorably linked with the Path of the Mighty in the Western world.

To say the Obrimos were the secret masters of the Church is to misunderstand their relationship. True, many Theurgists Awakened as faithful Catholics, and some influenced the Church, to be sure, but no cabal exerted sufficient influence to direct the Mother Church one way or another, and most mages within the ranks of the clergy kept their arts secret, avoiding the Sleeping Curse as well as the righteous wrath of their brethren, should they be discovered practicing what they would consider sorcery.

Light in the Dark Age

The fall of Rome spread shadows across the Western world, and the Theurgists maintained their role as Keepers of the Sacred Flame of Truth. They worked in secret within the ranks of the Church, although some went east when the Roman Empire split, likewise splitting the Church into its Western Catholic and Eastern Orthodox branches. Cabals operated in monasteries and churches, scribing books and aiding warriors of the light in fighting the forces of darkness.

Some learned Theurgists operated outside the auspices and protection of the Church in this time. They usually benefited

from noble patronage, giving them a measure of protection from persecution, and they were cautious about displaying too much of their power, lest they bring Paradoxes upon themselves. Rivalries between these scholarly magicians and the Theurgists of the faith sometimes ended poorly, particularly if the Seers of the Throne were able to manipulate events to set mage against mage, or to turn the Sleepers against their would-be benefactors.

Although prophets and saints were by no means as common as they once were, they still appeared from time to time. Some have scribed their names upon the Watchtower of the Golden Key, while others may have been Sleepwalkers, or Sleepers who walked the fine line between inspiration and madness. Their truths were heard, debated and accepted or rejected. New orders and ideas arose within Christianity. Islam blossomed in the East. The flame of truth slowly grew stronger and brighter.

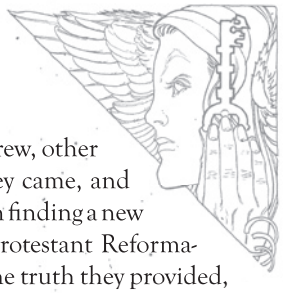
Enlightenment

The first stirrings of a split among the Obrimos of the Western world came with the era of the Enlightenment in Europe. The two strands of the Path so long intertwined — natural philosophers and spiritual mystics — separated when Theurgists Awakened outside the context of religion, or found their insights led them away from the doctrines of the faith.

These men and women still turned their eyes Heavenward, but to wonder at the movement of the celestial spheres and to understand the passing of the sun and the moon. Free Council Theurgists questioned the nature of the Supernal Light, speculated about aethyrs, crystal spheres and divine clockworks, put into motion by some unseen hand, an unmoved mover. Guardians of the Veil within the Church found such questions dangerous; the Mysterium said they revealed too much to the Sleepers, who were not yet ready. The Mysterium may well have been right, as many seekers of Enlightenment met their end at the stake, or spent their lives imprisoned — the effects of the Sleeping Curse or a suspicious establishment influenced by the Seers of the Throne?

Still, the light of knowledge and truth would not be doused, and the Watchtower of the Golden Key called to those who would seek it. Science and learning blossomed and flourished as humanity pushed back the boundaries of ignorance, some following the faint trails blazed by the Awakened through the wilderness.

It was in this time, particularly, that the Obrimos came to be associated with philosophers, scholars and craftmasons as well as the callings of faith. Some say a new faith, the belief in Reason, spread through the ranks of the Awakened, shining a new light in the darkness. Of course, this new faith was no less prone to the dangers of hubris and blindness than any other, and some of its followers enshrined Reason and Science as the new dogmas, not to be questioned.



Reformation

While the Renaissance of Reason grew, other Obrimos looked back on whence they came, and sought to change their faith rather than finding a new one. Some mages like to claim the Protestant Reformation was a reflection of insights into the truth they provided, but, more likely, new religious ideas gave the Awakened a new perspective on the truth, rather than the other way around.

As in times of trial before, questions, debate and passionate belief sparked Awakenings, leading only to more questions when the new Theurgists stood and looked upon the names written on the Golden Spire. What was the truth of the divine, Supernal World? The Obrimos sought after it with all their hearts, sometimes bringing them into bitter conflict.

The divisions among the chosen led to more Obrimos than ever before becoming Banishers. These orphans of Awakening, uncertain of the truth of what they experienced, decided all sorcerers and witchlings were evil. Banishers took it upon themselves to cleanse the world of this taint, leading to struggles among the Awakened where even traditional foes banded together against the threat of witch-hunters and inquisitors calling for their blood.

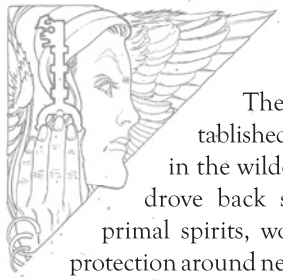
Eventually, elders of the mystic orders decided conflicts in the European homelands were becoming a problem. Similar to many leaders in the past, these elders sought to direct the passion and energy of their young firebrands elsewhere, outward rather than toward each other. So the newly chosen were sent out into the darkness of the unknown to carry the light with them.

Exploration

The Age of Exploration was a great age for the Obrimos of Europe. As their Irish, Norse, Chinese and Atlantean forbearers did in ages past, Theurgists set out into the unknown to seek the truth and carried it with them to light their way. They traveled down the dark road not taken to see what was there. For some, it was a matter of purification and salvation, for others wealth and opportunity, for many, a mystery to be solved.

The inheritors of Atlantis did more than visit the distant lands of the New World or explore trade routes such as the Silk Road. They also sought out the secrets of the celestial spheres and walked the hidden paths of the world. New Hallows awaited in other lands, many guarded by mystics or other forces.

More than a few Obrimos, recalling their duties as guardians and slayers of threats to humanity, wished to "liberate" these Hallows and see to their responsible use. The fact that many Hallows had native guardians of their own, some of whom had even written their names upon the Watchtower of the Golden Key, was overlooked. The actions of Obrimos crusaders have not been forgotten, however, and the celestial mages made their share of enemies in the New World.



The chosen established strongholds in the wilderness. They drove back strange and primal spirits, wove spells of protection around newly founded colonies and aided good and righteous folk in taming the wild to the yoke and the plow. For some Theurgists, the New World was indeed the Promised Land where they were free from the strictures of ancient cabals, able to establish a new covenant. To this day, cabals tracing their lineage back to the Puritan settlers of New England are still found there, particularly in Boston and the surrounding area. They continue to include many Obrimos among their ranks.



Revolution

The Obrimos drive to elevate the human spirit — to bring illumination — cast sparks from their guiding lamp to ignite the fires of revolution and rebellion in the Fallen World. Mages Awakened in Masonic lodges through their understanding of the Great Work of the Divine Architect. Bavarian Illuminati were truly enlightened within precepts of the Golden Spire. American Deists found the truth self-evident and declared it so to the world.

Rebellious young thinkers entered the ranks of the chosen and brought with them new ideas and a revolution of their own for the Obrimos. Many of the divisions that sent eager young mages off to explore the New World came home to roost as new visions of the Aether increasingly called the traditions of the past and the great elders of the mystic orders into question. In these new visions were the egalitarian and revolutionary ideals of the Free Council, a break from the old orders of Atlantis.

Also, just as the revolutions in the Fallen World, the struggles amongst the Awakened were sometimes violent, bloody and even misguided. Those who supported tradition were called cowards or, worse, agents of the Exarchs, intent on smothering the Path's light. Young rebels were called restless, foolish, heretical, threatening all that the orders had built since the loss of Atlantis.

In time, the Free Council was grudgingly accepted among the mystic orders, but even today, some see its members as upstarts and revolutionaries with no respect for tradition. The Path of the Mighty forked again, one road leading toward the future, the other toward the past, becoming increasingly divergent in a darkened world.

Invention

The passion and enthusiasm of the Free Council injected new energy into the inheritors of Atlantis, however. Even the other mystic orders were invigorated by new ideas, new challenges. Visions of the Realm of Aether found new mediums of expression, particularly in the exploration of science, but also in the secularization of religion and spirituality and in an explosion of cross-fertilization of different philosophical and magical systems.

Obrimos of the Free Council and Mysterium pursued the secrets of science with relish, combining those insights with ancient rituals and techniques to produce new spells and Arcane devices. While mages some made true scientific breakthroughs on their own, most were more interested in applying the principles, tools and trappings of science to their understanding of the Arcana. These Obrimos were among the first to embrace what modern mages call "technomagic."

More outré forms of science also found their way into the magic of the Mighty. Séances and spiritualism, while strongly influenced by Moros mages, also had their effect on the Obrimos. More so was the infant science of parapsychology and psychical research, bringing many of the traditional powers of willworkers into the scientific fold (or at least attempting to do so). The Sleeping Curse and the Seers of the Throne thwarted many of these efforts. Psychical science skirted too close to magic for the Sleepers' comfort. Psychical quickly became known as a pseudo-science and the stuff of fiction rather than fact.

But where awareness of the Arcane failed in the public sphere, the Arcane flourished in private. Magical lodges and orders become more common, and Sleepwalkers sensed the existence of a higher world, dimly aware of the greater truths awaiting them. They mixed magical lore from different parts of the world, finding the common threads left there by the

inheritors of Atlantis and trying to weave them back into a single, whole cloth. The work allowed some would-be mystics to truly Awaken, while others labored but never found anything beyond mere hedge magic and trickery.

Some mundane magical lodges were said to have patrons among the Path of the Mighty, "Secret Chiefs" who whispered advice, offered visions and pulled the strings behind the scenes. Certainly, the Guardians of the Veil wielded influence among them, and the other mystic orders observed their activities with interest. Such "outer orders" sometimes served to Awaken mages to the call of the Watchtowers and open their awareness to the Supernal World and the true mystic orders.

Transmutation

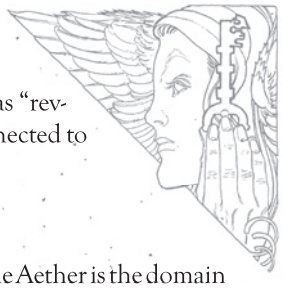
In the past few centuries, a new bolt of inspiration has struck the Obrimos, new revelations of the Realm of Aether have come to light, and a new faith burns passionately in the hearts of the chosen: science. Where once science and scientific discovery were considered inferior to "true" inspiration, even heretical distractions from the Path, new generations of mages have Awakened in an increasingly scientific and technological world. Unlike their ancestors, they embrace science as an instrument of enlightenment, their own and the world's.

This revelation has further diversified the ranks of the chosen, and created entirely new means of seeking and understanding the truth. However, the rise of science among the Obrimos has also widened rifts between some more mystical-minded Theurgists and their technomancer brethren. Is the Implicate Order or universal holism the same as the divine mind or universal oneness of the ancient Obrimos? Are the new ways of science another means of reaching the truth or a foolish heresy based on lies and misperception? The debate continues among the learned ranks of the chosen, and other inheritors of Atlantis.

Modern Obrimos of a spiritual bent are often challenged to reconcile their faith with the demands of a secular society and with the experiences of their Awakening and the beliefs of their fellow Theurgists. Is there a "one true way," or are all faiths merely shadows of the Invisible Truth? Can honest people of good faith cooperate and coexist peacefully, or is conflict among the chosen inevitable? Are the ancient beliefs and practices of theurgy outdated and destined for replacement by science, psychology and a human-centric view of creation? These are the issues Theurgists struggle with as they look toward the future of their Path.

Illumination

The Obrimos tend to discuss Awakening in terms of the Supernal Light of Aether. "Illumination" and "enlightenment" are two of its most common terms, both tracing back to roots meaning to literally shed light upon something. Initiates are said to "see the light" and terms such as "revelation" and "vision" are likewise connected to light and seeing.



The Aether

Celestial Realm of Supernal Light, the Aether is the domain of angels, where the Fires of Creation still burn brightly. Aether is a place of seething power: in the thunder echoing across the burning meadows, in the lightning splitting the luminous sky and in the wind stirring constantly, from gentle breeze to raging gale. There is electricity in the air, literally and figuratively, and visitors report a dizzying and almost giddy sense of power flowing around and through them.

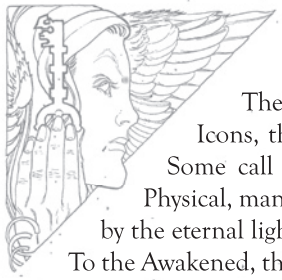
Aether is a realm of power. You can feel it in the air, tingling across your skin. Aether is a place of majesty and might, where everything seems somehow more vibrant, forceful and idealized in form and appearance, more *real*. Things in the Aether are perfect in ways things in the Fallen World simply cannot be. Of course, some things are perfectly terrible, fearsome or awe-inspiring. There is beauty and terror here so intense they can pierce the heart and leave it broken.

Obrimos say Aether is the Realm of primal creation, the highest and closest to the Prime source, and therefore the first of the Supernal Realms, from which the others emanate toward to the darkness of Stygia, the Abyss and the Fallen World. Some mystic maps of reality even arrange the five realms in a pentacle around the central hub of the Fallen World. The Abyss is a dark gulf surrounding the world on all sides. Stygia and Pandemonium lie at the bottom two points, in the "underworld" beneath the Fallen World. Arcadia and the Primal Wild sit at the two midpoints, at the same level as the Earth (which is why they most resemble it), but "sideways" from it, veiled by the Abyss. At the very summit, the Aether stands alone, with only the Prime and then the ultimate Truth above and beyond it. Other mages say such "mystic secrets" are no more than excuses for arrogance and elitism on the part of the Obrimos.

Still, there is no denying that the power of pure magic, of primal creation, flows most freely in Aether of all the Realms. Whether this makes the Realm better or worse or any closer to the ultimate Truth compared to any of the others is a matter of protracted (and sometimes bitter) debate among willworkers.

The Power and the Glory

The Aether manifests from a pure and mysterious source, the Prime itself. The true nature of the realm's unmanifest source is as mysterious as the Invisible Truth itself. Indeed, many mages believe they are one and the same, and to fully understand the Prime source is to understand the Invisible Truth and vice versa. Others believe the Invisible Truth is an even deeper mystery, but the Prime is a gateway to it.



The initial emanations of the Prime are Ideals, Icons, the ideas of things in the Fallen World. Some call them *eikones,* archetypes or oversouls. Physical, manifest things are as shadows to them, cast by the eternal light of this Realm filtering through them. To the Awakened, the Ideals are gods, spirits and archangels, entities of vast and mysterious power and purpose. The Obrimos call upon them for aid and insight, and sometimes seek them out in journeys to the Astral Reaches.

The Ideals are not limited solely to entities, however. Anything that has been or could be stems from an Ideal that springs from the Prime source. There are Ideals of mundane objects, buildings, places — even philosophies and ideas. Modern Obrimos expound upon the Ideals of inventions and technologies as yet undiscovered, merely waiting for a visionary mind able to apprehend them. Spiritual Theurgists talk about the Ideals of understanding, compassion, creation — the very fabric of meaning in existence.

Death holds little power in Aether. It is a place of creation, where all is eternal and does not decay. That is not to say there is no destruction in the Celestial Realm; the unleashed forces there are capable of terrible devastation, but such things are merely changes in state of being. Flames may burn things to ash, but from the ash springs new life. In terms of science, energy and matter are changed, transmuted, but never truly destroyed. The Realm's nature is the opposite of the dark and eternal oblivion of Stygia. Here the Prime, and therefore creation, is eternal and boundless.

In manifestation, the Aether is *power:* raw, crackling, thunderous, fantastic power, the sort of power wielded by the gods and dreamt of by mortals since before the founding of the Mystic Isle. The awe primitives felt at lightning and thunder, from the sight of the first fire, is the essence of the Golden Realm. It is the glorious light crowning kings and angels, but also the fire that rains down to lay waste to cities. One of the first lessons the Realm teaches Theurgists is that power knows no morals and no limits; those things are imposed by the mind, heart and soul wielding it.

The Most High — Dwellers of the Aether

Like their Realm, the entities of the Aether are glorious beings of fire, light and power. They are awesome in the truest sense of the word: inspiring both wonder and terror in those who behold them. It is said the Most High of Aether are so pure and so vast that their light burns mortal eyes, and their voices are like thunder, shattering minds still bound by the limits of the Fallen World.

Many call these beings "angels," but confusing them with winsome cherubs or the gentle angels of picture-postcards and votive candles is a mistake. No, these are the seraphim and mighty thrones of legend. They are primal, powerful beings, as likely to manifest as whirling wheels of fire or peacock fans of burning eyes as they are in the forms of winged humans. Even then, angels of Aether possess unearthly, androgynous beauty. They have no sex, being closer to the Prime and therefore above such dualities as male and female.

Angels are not the sole entities of the Aether, of course. A great Celestial Host emanates from the Supernal Light, from the mightiest archangels down to the lesser Powers and Principalities. Some Theurgists believe the Most High Celestial Spirits are the Ideals from which their lesser brethren emanate, just as material things emanate from the Ideals of the Supernal Realm. All of the diverse denizens of the Realm have their place and purpose, although only a fraction of these is known to any willworker (or can be known until the mage has attained sufficient wisdom to see the Invisible Truth in all its glory).



Those Obrimos with a more scientific outlook often view these entities not as creatures with separate existences of their own, but as autonomous aspects of human consciousness. To some, they are elements of the soul that only seem to be separate, discrete individuals, aspects of the psyche that the ego cannot encompass (and so control) by itself, but that are still part of a person's greater consciousness nonetheless. Some Obrimos declare that what appears to be independence among these "beings" is only an anthropomorphism of forces and energies too great for the mind to perceive, and hence the mind projects onto

them the illusion of life as the only frame of reference capable of grasping these energies' vast fluctuations.

The Fallen Ones

Many Obrimos speak of mighty spirits of Aether that have "fallen" from their place in the Supernal Realm into the darkness and imperfection of the Fallen World, or even the Abyss itself. The Fallen Ones are a topic of considerable debate and speculation among Theurgists, although some believe that dwelling on such things is none too healthy.

Are the Fallen and the acamoth one and the same? Some believe so, or at least believe some of the denizens of the Abyss were once beings of light that fell from grace. Now they seek escape from their Abyssal exile or simply revenge upon the Awakened for storming the celestial gates or shattering the Atlantean Ladder.

Likewise, some of the inhabitants of the other Supernal Realms may have originated in Aether. To the Obrimos, the other Realms exist on a lower level, so spirits may have fallen or descended to them, creating demons or Fae, for example. Other mages (and those selfsame spirits) tend to scoff at such theories, but Theurgists point out that both demons and Fae are notorious liars.

Finally, some spirits known to manifest in the Fallen World may have descended from the Supernal Light. Tales of the *djinn*, "spirits of smokeless fire," and their great City of Brass speak of an origin amidst the fire and light of the Aether, for example. Again, if they have fallen (or been exiled) from the Light, they choose not to speak of it, and are well known for lying when it suits them.

These stories and ideas make the Obrimos leery of spirits, since they might be higher beings fallen from grace. Because of this, Obrimos who study the Spirit Arcanum tend to be better at exorcism than invocation, unless they are calling a spirit they know to be kin to the Most High, and even that is an art to be handled with great care.

Shadows in the Cave — Signs of the Mighty

As Plato observed, the Supernal Light casts shadows on the walls of the "cave" that is the Fallen World. Souls imprisoned by the Sleeping Curse take these shadows as reality, rather than reflections of a higher truth. The chosen know them for what they are but still, the shadows of the Supernal Realm are still symbols of the higher truths of the Aether, if one looks past them to see the *prima materia* and the patterns within.

Sun and Stars

For as long as humanity has looked up at the Heavens in wonder, the Sun and stars, celestial fires, have been symbols of the Supernal Fire of Prime. The Sun represents its unity and oneness, the stars its many scattered sparks and reflections. Little wonder that the patron deities associated with the Obrimos are solar and sky gods. Sun disks, solar crosses and similar sigils appear among the Path's symbols. For many initiates, the image of the power and majesty of the Sun is their first glimpse at the glory of Prime.

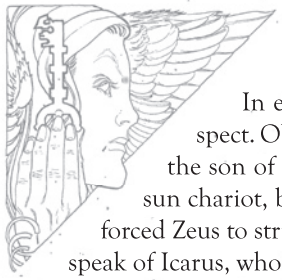
The Moon is a lesser symbol of Prime, associated with illusion and Prime magic phantasms, for the Moon is a pale reflection of the Sun, just as phantasms are pale reflections of real things. Some say this tendency of the Obrimos to devalue the lunar sphere, coupled with the importance assigned to it by the Thyrsus, is one of the roots of conflict between the two Paths, and between solar sky worshippers and lunar Earth-cults in Sleeper history.

Fire and Light

If the Sun is the greatest symbol of the Arcanum of Prime, then the greatest symbol of the Arcanum of Forces for the Obrimos is fire, and the light it sheds. For all but the briefest period of history, fire and light have been inexorably linked: the only sources of light were torches, campfires candles, and lanterns, or the celestial fires of the Sun and stars. Fire is the primal tool, the first magic used to banish the cold and darkness, to transform base matter into food, weapons, tools and art, to consume the dead and release their souls back into the light. Obrimos legend says they first gave fire to humanity with embers taken from the Heavens.

Obrimos often speak in terms of light. They are the illuminated, the en-lightened and the Supernal Light of the Aether is their guide and goal. Darkness represents ignorance and fear — all the primal terrors of the night the chosen stand against. The lamp or lantern is a common Obrimos symbol and tool, and sanctums often hold a presence light or eternal flame as a reminder of the higher light of the Golden Spire.

Fire is the weapon and tool of the chosen. They draw down the fires of Heaven at their command, whether to light the darkness or to smite their enemies. For some, fire is a gift, to be wielded with great care and responsibility. Others "steal" fire from the Supernal Realm, bridging the prohibitions of the Abyss to bring the primal spark down into the Fallen World and light the way for the Sleepers.



In either case, fire must be treated with respect. Obrimos masters tell the myth of Phaeton, the son of Helios who wished to drive his father's sun chariot, but whose hubris burned the Earth and forced Zeus to strike him down with a thunderbolt. They speak of Icarus, who flew too close to the sun, which melted the wax holding his wings together, plummeting him to his death in the sea. The lofty powers of Aether must be used wisely, or they will turn upon their wielder.

Lightning and Thunder

The next most important symbol of forces for the Obrimos is lightning, and the accompanying thunder. Indeed, for modern Theurgists, the mythic star of electricity rises to eclipse that of fire and to assume many of its roles. After all, bottled lightning is the new magical tool: lighting cities, powering devices, banishing darkness and even restoring life to the dead, the power of the modern Prometheus.

Lightning is another symbol of revelation: the "bolt of enlightenment" that strikes, the moment of "Eureka!" when a discovery is made. The slumbering power within humanity is likened to a spark, emblematic of both fire and lightning.

Harnessing electricity's untamed power and potential is a strong image for many Free Council Obrimos, from the gross power of Jacob's ladders and lightning rods to channel a storm strike to reanimate a corpse to the subtleties of invisible broadcast power or vast computer networks transforming electricity into information and then into new, virtual, forms of reality.

Gold

The divine yellow metal has long been associated with the Path of the Mighty: the Watchtower of the Golden Key stands at the gates between the Supernal Realm and the Abyss, ever vigilant. The gold sought by alchemists was not merely wealth, but the transformation of the base and gross into the refined and subtle. Gold is the metal of the sun, shining with its reflected glory, and it is a metal of purity — unchanging, incorruptible, eternal.

Obrimos tools and ornaments are often made of gold, or gilded. The uninitiated sometimes see this as a prideful display of wealth or status, but the Theurgists understand the true meaning of the symbol as one of the importance of spirit over gross materialism.

Raptors

The ability to fly, to reach closer to the bright glory of the Heavens, has fascinated humanity since the beginning. The Obrimos are strongly associated with ascent toward the Celestial Realm, and so birds and parts of birds (particularly feathers and wings) are found in the symbols of the Path. Many Obrimos talk of their journey to the Watchtower as a "flight of spirit," and the denizens of the Aether are often feathered or winged. The great scholar-god Thoth has the head of an ibis bird, while All-Father Odin has his ravens of thought and memory.

In particular, proud and mighty raptors are associated with the Obrimos: the hawk, the eagle and the falcon. The eagle is the bird of Zeus, while Horus the Avenger is hawk-headed and the goddess Freya of the Vanir owns a cloak of feathers, allowing her to transform into a falcon. These birds of prey fly high, their vision clear and penetrating and their talons sharp. An Obrimos in battle is like a striking raptor: swift, fierce and merciless.

Images of birds of prey are common in Obrimos lore, as are creatures with their qualities: angels with wings of fire, proud griffins and hippogriffs, the eagle kings of the four winds, hawks bearing the solar disk, eagles carrying thunderbolts in their talons, and so forth.

The Dark Pinnacle

It is an embarrassment — to say the least — for many Obrimos that one of the modern expressions of the symbols of their Path is Nazism. To create a sense of Aryan pride and unity, the Nazis co-opted many occult and spiritual symbols: the sun-wheel (swastika), the thunderbolt (sigil), the majesty and purity of gold, the eagle and the fiery colors of red and white (associated with Forces and Prime).

These and other associations of Obrimos symbols with tyranny are troubling to many on the Path. Some Theurgists want to reclaim "tainted" symbols, while others prefer to ignore the whole matter, out of shame or simple disinterest. The same is true of other dark periods associated with the symbols of the Path of the Mighty, when hubris and pride directed power toward evil ends in crusades, inquisitions, holy wars and persecutions. Some modern Obrimos try to distance themselves from such examples of "Sleeper folly," proclaiming it has nothing to do with the Awakened, but fearing that it does, and rightly so.

Sparks of Illumination

Sparks of the greater flame of the Path of the Mighty glimmer in many of the ideas and beliefs of the Sleepers. Some are distortions of the ancient teachings of the Obrimos, others perhaps deep and dim recollections of the truth, cloaked in symbols the Sleepers can understand. None can truly say for certain if the Theurgists created or inspired these teachings, or if these sparks of illumination merely served to ignite the flames of Obrimos Awakenings and guide initiates to the Golden Spire. Whatever the case, they are common paths to the greater truth that is the Realm of Aether.



Neoplatonism

The ideas espoused by Plato, and later expanded upon be medieval scholars, posit a higher reality, a realm of Ideal Forms, of which the material world is only a reflection or shadow. Obrimos see in this philosophy the Realm of Aether and the Patterns of Prime making up the Tapestry. Neoplatonism is a strong influence on Western magic and resonates strongly with the Path of the Mighty.

Gnosticism

Gnosticism is an early monotheistic Christian belief, named for the Greek *gnosis,* "to know." It states that the material (Fallen) world is base and corrupt, created as a prison for the divine souls of humanity. The primal or divine light fell into the material, scattered and broken, and a jealous creator-god known as the Demiurge seeks to keep the shards of the divine one from reuniting with their source.

Gnosticism is the most accurate reflection of the true War in Heaven and the shattering of the Celestial Ladder found in Sleeper beliefs, so many Obrimos believe Gnosticism was inspired by the teachings and stories of mages, perhaps those of their Path. The early Roman Catholic Church declared Gnosticism heresy, forcing it into the shadows, where perhaps it better served the Awakened than by forcing Sleepers to confront the truth (and their own Disbelief) so directly. Some believe this treatment of Gnosticism came from both Guardians of the Veil working within the Church and mystagogues within Gnostic cults, to ensure the sacred mystery remained both.

Monotheism

The idea of divine oneness is both the most uniting and most divisive in Sleeper history. To Theurgists, who strive to reach and understand the Prime, and from it the Invisible Truth, monotheism is a reflection of their quest for oneness and unity.

Many Obrimos find their way to the Path through monotheist religious beliefs, although the revelations of their Awakening often shake the foundations of their faith. The Path of the Mighty is as often home to heresy as orthodoxy, and most Obrimos recognize there are many ways to strive toward unity with the Prime. This includes the "faiths of the book" (Judaism Christianity, and Islam) as well as Eastern faiths embracing spiritual oneness with a higher source, such as Taoism and Buddhism (which, while not technically monotheist, does seek spiritual enlightenment and reunion with the divine source). A number of pagan beliefs, from Ifa and voodoo to neo-paganism, embrace some form of higher, omnipotent divinity.

Even agnostic and atheist Obrimos tend to be unifiers. Whether they search for the truth of the great mystery of the existence (or non-existence) of divinity or the unified theory of everything, they tend to see patterns and structure underlying disparate and diverse things. Obrimos Free Councilors playing with chaos theory and the like see patterns and Implicate Order arising out of seemingly random events, for example.

It's notable that many Obrimos are actually dualists rather than monotheists, in that they recognize *two* nigh omnipotent, and opposed, divine forces at work. From the ancient Zoroastrians and the conflict between Ahura Mazda of the light and Angru Manyu of the dark to the God and Devil of Christianity, these faiths recognize the existence of supernatural evil as well as good.

Kaballah

The first mages were seekers at heart. Their Awakening brought them to the Watchtowers, and they spent much time and effort studying ways to bridge the gap across the Abyss to reach from the Fallen World to the Supernal. Many Obrimos seek the map of the Tapestry that will show the way to the ultimate Truth, a less direct route than the shattered Celestial Ladder, but no less effective.

The Hebrew Kaballah is an expression of this quest, to map and order all of Creation, showing the route from the mundane (Malkuth) to the supernal (Kether). To the mystic orders, the hidden sphere of Daath, lying so near the Abyss, represents the broken Celestial Ladder of knowledge and the pride and hubris that brought it down. Among mages, there are many such *mapa Mysteriorum,* or maps of the Mysteries, each with its own structure and secrets.

Hermeticism

According to legend, the teachings of Hermes Trismegistus, the "Thrice-Great Hermes," come from an inscription on an emerald tablet, dating back at least as far as ancient Egypt. Its key principle is "As above, so below," what the inheritors of Atlantis believe is a description of the Supernal and Fallen Worlds.

Hermeticism later came to encompass many elements of Western occult philosophy, particularly with the work of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in the 19th century. This sect incorporated Tarot, Kaballah, Masonic rituals, and yoga among other practices. The Free Council finds the synergy created by the Golden Dawn inspirational, and some hope to achieve even greater results mixing diverse occult symbols and practices (much to the chagrin of more traditionalist mages).

Ascension

The so-called Ascension movement or philosophy is an eclectic New Age gumbo of ideas embracing the philosophy of a higher spiritual existence and the ability of humanity to evolve to achieve it (or regain it, in some cases, as with Gnosticism), not an unusual idea in human history.

Where Ascension gets unusual is in its embrace of things like the existence of extraterrestrials or "ultraterrestrials." Generally these intelligences are benevolent higher beings trying to

help humanity attain the same evolved state. Sometimes they are untrustworthy alien tricksters or threats. The mages who don't dismiss Ascensionist ideas out of hand tend to believe these beings may represent spirits, Fae or similar entities. A few wonder whether the more dangerous predatory aliens of Ascension are actually outsiders.

A particular concern is the phenomenon of "walk-ins," people who claim they are higher beings who have taken possession of mortal forms with the permission of the former "occupant" in order to do important work in the material (Fallen) world. The idea is enough to make some mages wonder: if these people are not merely delusional, then what are they? The most common guess is spirits of some sort possessing human forms, but it's also possible they are mages caught up in delusions to cushion their minds from the experience of Awakening, on their way to joining the ranks of the Mad, if they have not already.

Quantum Physics

Many liken the ideas of quantum physics to ancient ways of seeing the world as made out of energy or even thoughts and dreams. The Obrimos are no different in that respect, and Free Council Theurgists in particular often seek the Implicate Order underlying reality rather than the divine mind of God (assuming there is a difference between the two).

Quantum indeterminism is seen as magic on the smallest scale: the act of observing, of being a part of the world, changes the world. This is the power of the Awakened, except theirs works on a far larger stage than subatomic particles. Chaos theory and quantum terminology find their way into the work of modern Obrimos as they take and shape the seething ocean of energy that is the universe. Eventually, they hope to part the cosmic sea, to observe the depths of the Prime underneath, and be changed in so doing.

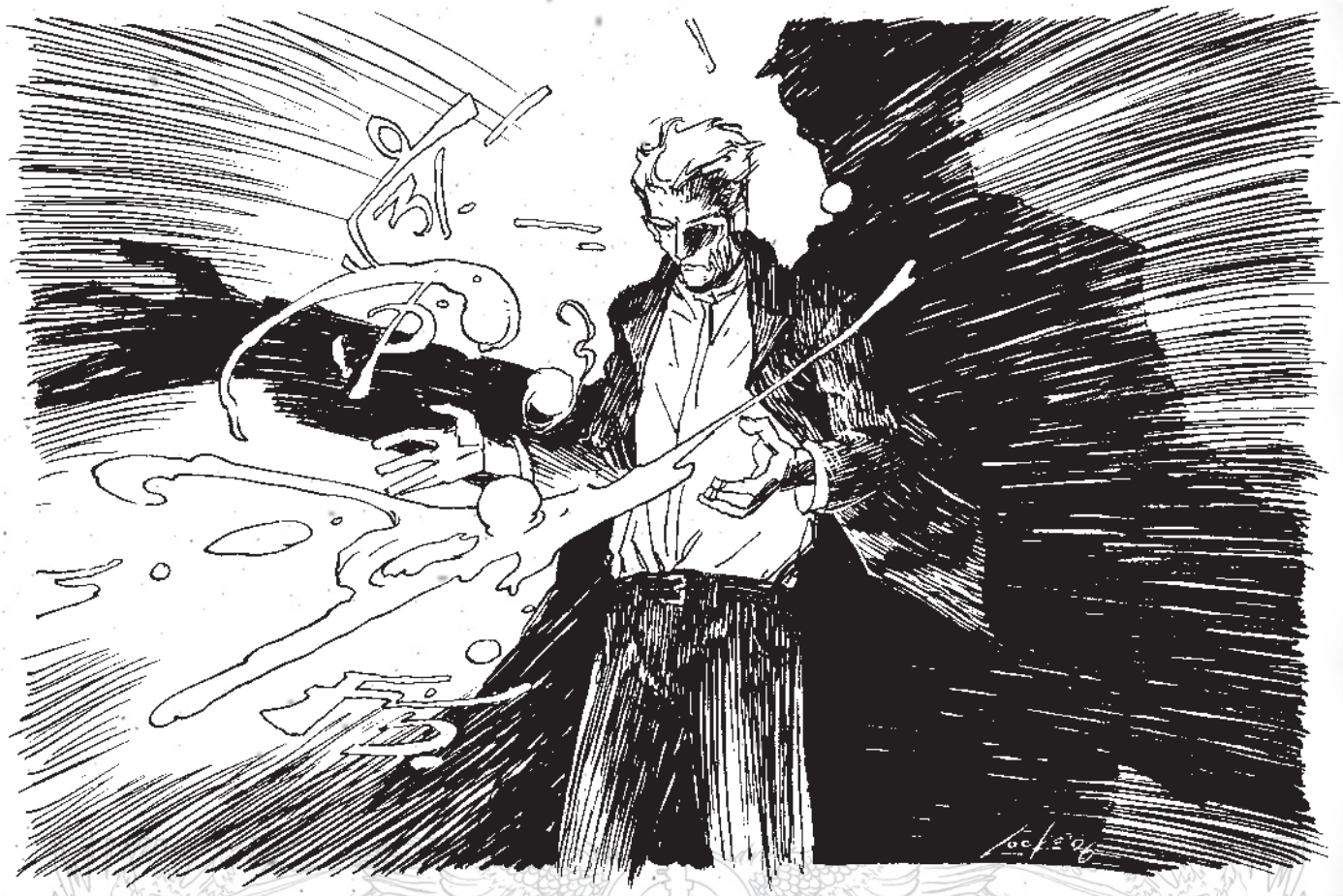
Manifestation

The ideas, symbols and visions of the Mighty manifest in the Fallen World in a variety of ways. While sharp-eyed mages can often tell Obrimos from Mastigos from Acanthus, the truth is the Mighty are as diverse as any of the Awakened, although there are certain similarities and common elements among them.

As with other mages, the Path of an Obrimos is more visible when actively engaged in magic or ritual. The trappings of the Path of the Mighty appear more clearly in the privacy of Obrimos sanctums. Out among Sleepers, the chosen are more likely to keep their light hidden under a bushel than to risk the wrath of the Sleeping Curse or exposure to their enemies. Their signs in the Fallen World are usually subtle and blend in with what Sleepers consider "ordinary."

Appearance

Theurgists have a way of announcing themselves, and popular belief amongst the Awakened says they are the least subtle of





mages. This is often true, but time and circumstance have taught the Obrimos subtlety, when there is a need. They do not always appear in blazing auras of light, calling down fire and lightning from the Heavens and speaking with voices like thunder. No, the modern Obrimos adopt a humbler appearance, although they're still capable of shining in all their glory when they wish.

Many of the Mighty are given to utilitarian styles of dress and appearance, particularly those who have taken up vocations as warriors, monks, priests or others who have sworn oaths of poverty and abstain from worldly concerns. Stereotypical Obrimos clothing is dark, well worn and simple, suitable for going unnoticed in a crowd or passing on the streets at night. In this respect, Theurgists are considered as somber as the Moros, if not more so.

Obrimos tend to reserve flashier garments for ritual work and ceremonial occasions. Of course, there are always exceptions, and some Silver Ladder Obrimos in particular are given to showy outfits displaying their wealth and status. Some Theurgists favor garments reflecting purity or the image of the Supernal Fire. White, gold and red are common colors, with the richest clothes having actual trim in golden thread or cloth-of-gold.

A common "accessory" for many Theurgists is some symbol of their faith, for those with a religious bent. This may be a piece of jewelry (necklace, ring, bracelet), an item of clothing (hat, turban, patch sewn onto clothing), or even a caste mark, tattoo or brand. Obrimos wear these things proudly, but know to show discretion in certain circumstances. Those Theurgists who adopt Atlantean symbols are more careful about displaying them openly, although they do provide a useful means for the Awakened to recognize each other.

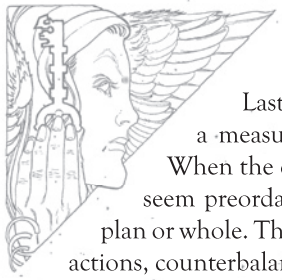
Beyond these simple things, the only trait the Mighty seem to have in common is a certain look of almost preternatural calm and certainty. Those in the know say it's possible to recognize an Obrimos by the look of absolute certainty of their place in the order of creation, a look normally associated with saints and madmen. The spark of their passionate faith is reflected in their eyes and in their manner.

Nimbus

The nimbus of the Obrimos is truly worthy of the name, since it most often manifests as the light, sound and sheer power wielded by the chosen. The Obrimos are the most given to classical auras or haloes of celestial light, sometimes accompanied by the sound of distant thunder or ethereal music. Their light is often golden or pure white, but appears in all the colors of the rainbow, sometimes as pure light, others as "cold fire" that flickers but does not burn.

Some Theurgists have a particular color (or range of colors) associated with their nimbus, as individual as a fingerprint, and associated with the mage's personality and Awakening. So a warrior of the Adamantine Arrow might have a nimbus of fiery red or burning gold, while a Mysterium scholar has an aura of cool blue and a thearch of the Silver Ladder has a silvery-white nimbus, reflecting purity and nobility. While a number of different cabals and traditions associated certain colors with particular meanings, evidence shows it is largely a reflection of the individual personality rather than some objective measurement. Still, Theurgists with a tendency toward a particular nimbus color or colors usually manifest it in all aspects of their magic.

Similarly, some of the Mighty have a particular sound or sounds associated with their nimbus, audible only to those with Mage Sight. It may be the distant (or not so distant) sound of rolling thunder; for others it is celestial music, choirs of sweet voices, the sound of a crackling fire or a deep hum like an electric motor. The sound often varies according to the mage's mood and magic.



Lastly, the Obrimos nimbus seems to carry a measure of the Path's faith and confidence. When the chosen work their magic, things tend to seem preordained, as if part of some greater, divine plan or whole. There is a certain soothing *rightness* to their actions, counterbalancing the glory and majesty of it all, and recalling humanity's ancient guides and guardians. The Mighty wear the noble mantle of divine right that was the birthright of sovereigns throughout history.

Sanctums

Obrimos have built sanctums since the first nights when they stood guard for Sleepers huddled around a sacred fire. Later, their sanctums protected Theurgists from the weight of Sleeper Disbelief as well, offering a soothing sanctuary from the pressures of the Fallen World, a place to share in the glories and understanding of the Supernal Realms.

To this day, Theurgist-run sanctums still provide sanctuary for those in need and a place for the chosen to retreat from the concerns of the mundane world and get in touch with the Supernal Realms. Obrimos sanctums tend to be of two sorts: citadels and cloisters, although they are known by various names among different traditions, and some sanctums serve both functions to varying degrees.

Citadels

Citadels recall when the Obrimos stood as guardians and sentinels against the forces of darkness. The Obrimos still do so, but now they cloak their work in secrecy to avoid Disbelief and provoking Paradoxes. Obrimos citadels offer shelter to mages and Sleepwalkers in need of the Mighty's protection and help safeguard Sleepers against dangers they literally cannot imagine. Citadels also serve as places to train and billet Awakened warriors in service to a higher calling.

Citadels, being literal fortresses where the warriors practice, train and plan out their battles, are most associated with the Adamantine Arrow. Virtually every citadel has at least a guardsman or guardian who belongs to this order. Many citadels belong entirely to the Arrows, or are shared between them and another order.

In ancient times, the warriors of a citadel often belonged to a single order of knighthood or similar fraternity (or sorority, for citadels of warrior-women). Some of these ancient organizations still survive into modern times, with the Obrimos of a citadel initiated into their rites and practices. Although such "knights" are now far more likely to fight with firearms and ride motorcycles than they are to wield sword and shield and ride horses, the traditions still apply, and there are still uses for honest steel in the Awakened world.

Obrimos citadels are built upon Hallows as much to safeguard the Fallen World from the unleashed forces of magic as to draw upon the Hallow's power. Citadels are often built on or near Verges for the same reason, acting as "gatehouses" between the Realms. The citadels stand guard on the Border Marches of the material realm against any intruders from the Shadow Realm.

Sample Citadel: St. George's Church

With steeples, stonework, gargoyles and stained-glass windows, this Catholic church in a rundown area of town was once a beautiful example of neo-Gothic architecture. Now the church is surrounded by a high chain-link fence topped with barbed wire, which still hasn't been able to prevent the building's foundations from being covered in graffiti and gang tags, or the church's windows from getting broken on occasion. The once-manicured grounds have shrunk to a brown, spotty area immediately around the building and a parking lot with cracked pavement and sprouting weeds, surrounded by a high fence with a locked gate. Still, the church fares better than most of the neighborhood around it, which has fallen into urban decay and despair.

St. George's remains a light of hope. Local people in dire need somehow find their way into the church as they wander past or see the light shining like a beacon through its stained-glass windows late at night as they feel the presence of something closing in on them. The incense-laden air within is calm and comforting, filled with the gentle glow of candles and a sacred quiet. Those who know the church say St. George's is a holy place, a place of sanctuary in the truest sense.

This is in no small part because the church has long served as a citadel for Theurgists in the area. Although the keeper of St. George's has always been a mage of the Catholic faith, all true "servants of the light" are welcome here, as are those in need of their protection and guidance. The current caretaker of the citadel is Sister Mary Angelica, a Benedictine nun who Awakened to inscribe her name upon the Watchtower of the Golden Key some 30 years ago as a young novice. While you wouldn't know it to look at her, the local mages know her as an experienced initiate of the Adamantine Arrows and a true force to be reckoned with.

Sister Mary Angelica spent years as an exorcist, demon-hunter and monster-slayer, but now is

content to maintain St. George's as a stronghold of the light and a place where other younger and more eager mages can come to do God's work. Father Petrus, the parish priest, is a Sleepwalker and aware of Sister Mary Angelica's unique calling, as well as the additional purpose his church serves. Although he does not fully understand all aspects of the Awakened world, he has seen the good sister in action on a number of occasions and greatly respects her abilities and advice.

Cloisters

Whereas citadels are ever watchful of the outside world, cloisters turn their attention inward. They are places of peace, quiet and contemplation, away from the pressing weight of the Fallen World, where the Awakened can study and live openly, at least within the boundaries of the sanctum's walls.

Cloisters range in terms of their isolation from the outside world. Some simply provide a brief respite, like a shade tree on a sunny day. Others have little or no contact with outsiders, and require strict oaths of those who choose to come and live there. Life at a cloister may be temporary or a lifelong commitment, although generally modern cloisters are at least open to the comings and goings of the Awakened. Few mages believe they can entirely isolate themselves from the Fallen World, although some still try.

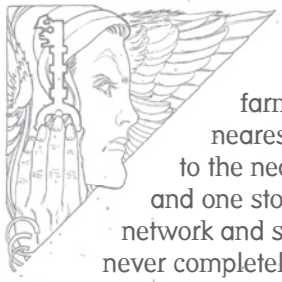
Some cloisters are cast in the Christian monastic mold (whether or not they are Christian in practice): the inhabitants live simple lives, taking vows of poverty and obedience and spending their time working or in prayer, meditation and study. Similar Eastern cloisters model themselves on Buddhist temples and often combine training in physical disciplines such as martial arts or yoga with honest labor and quiet contemplation. Such places are often strongholds of the Perfected Adept or Ascended Adept Legacies.

Other cloisters are less severe, more like Old World cabals and mage-holds, where the Awakened have the advantages of Sleepwalker acolytes and helpers, and do not necessarily forsake material comforts in their isolation. These cloisters are more refuge from the Fallen World, places of study and experimentation. They range from traditional sanctums built around libraries and ritual working spaces to modern laboratories and think tanks with wireless networks and machine shops where technomancers turn out their latest wonders.



Sample Cloister: Forethought Research, Inc.

This high-tech "offsite" location for a well-known technical research firm is situated on a



farm nearly an hour's drive to the nearest sizable town (about half that to the nearest town with a general store and one stoplight). A cutting-edge wireless network and satellite link ensures the firm is never completely out of touch with the outside world, however. The "think tank" is where some of FRI's most cutting-edge research gets done, including quite a few things the board of directors doesn't know about.

The site serves as a sanctum for a cabal of technomancers exploring different varieties of human-machine interface, virtual reality and artificial intelligence, and their interactions with the various Arcana. These mages, primarily initiates of the Ascended Adept Legacy (see later in this chapter), focus on ways of freeing the mind from the limitations of the body, and therefore the limitations of the material realm.

The members of the Forethought cabal are obsessive techno-geeks who get all their entertainment and interaction from the Internet, television and arguing with each other about obscure technical, magical or trivial facts and figures. These technomancers value their privacy and the safe working environment they've created for themselves.

Naturally, the mages at FRI are careful who they allow to visit their sanctum, and what information the cabal members reveal to the outside world. They're quite plugged-in (literally) to what's going on, however. Online search programs keep track of any information of potential interest, sifting it and presenting it to the members of the cabal. They follow up on anything that looks promising, including potential new recruits, Sleepwalkers and mages on the verge of Awakening who may simply need the right environment.

Although FRI does actually turn out quite a bit of useful technological information, the cabal's primary work involves melding magic and technology in ways only the Awakened can understand and use. Some of the cabal's experiments have been frustrated by the fact that only an Awakened mind and spirit can wield magic; computer programs cannot, although there's considerable speculation about the potential of creating a new, lasting mentality able to understand and perhaps even grasp the secrets of the Arcana. Only time will tell whether the technomancers are successful. Perhaps they already are, and their creation has been quietly observing its creators to learn more about them before choosing to announce itself to them.

Rites of the Mighty

The rituals and traditions of the Path of the Mighty are intended to humble the chosen and remind them of their duty and responsibility to their Path and the Sleepers. These rites help to place Theurgists in touch with their power, but in a way that places that power in the service of a higher calling.

Oblations

Prayer is the most common oblation of Theurgists within their sanctums, from simple prayers of thanksgiving to complex rituals honoring the divine in a variety of forms. In this context, "prayer" is any ritual oblation the Theurgist takes up. In some sanctums, prayer involves attending or performing rites at specific times. In others, prayer is entirely self-imposed, honoring the Prime source in a number of different ways, and, through it, reaching out to the heart of the Hallow.

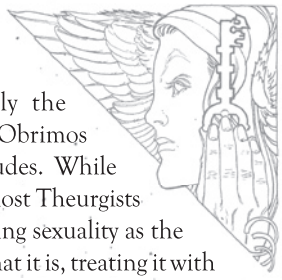
Closely related to prayer (indivisible in some cases) is quiet meditation and introspection. Meditation takes many forms, from *zazen* sitting to prayers offered in monastic cells to rites of confession and purification to unburden mind and soul. When the mind is quiet, the soul at peace, the Mana flows freely into the place opened within the heart.

Fire-tending vigils are an honored Obrimos tradition. Since time immemorial, the chosen have been associated with the givers of fire to humanity. The hearth-fire represents safety, security and hope, giving light and warmth in the cold and darkness of the night. The rites involve everything from keeping a candle, lamp or campfire burning throughout the night to tending an ancient hearth in the company of other initiates and performing complex rituals to honor what the fire represents while keeping it burning. Many Obrimos sanctums include a hearth, forge or presence light for this very reason.

Obrimos dedications (see the following) are also observed as oblations within the bounds of a Hallow, as well as outside of one. In particular, Theurgist sanctums are often places to shed the ties and distractions of the mundane world and to focus on hard work, practice and dedication to craft and skill. From crafters hard at work to students drilling in martial arts in the *dojo* to laboratories for enlightened scientists to research and study, focus and purity of intent are powerful tools for the chosen.

Ritual

The purpose of ritual is the creation and acknowledgement of the sacred and the magical. The mage goes within and gets



in touch with the Supernal Realm, reawakening that first spark of magic, the call of the Watchtower and the Aether. For a brief time, the Theurgist leaves the Fallen World behind and is at home within the magic. This is the very definition of *theurgy*, rituals to place the performer in touch with the divine.

The actual rites are as diverse as the Obrimos and no two are exactly alike, although there are time-honored formulas. For some Theurgists, ritual is prayer, worshipping the divine in whatever way they see it, from celebrating High Mass to singing hosannas to reciting prayers in Hebrew. For others, ritual is meditation, whether inwardly focused, such as reciting mantras or *zazen* sitting, or outwardly focused, such as martial arts *katas*, yoga or dance. There are rituals to honor all aspects of creation, from thrice-daily calls to the sun to five daily prayers to the yearly solstices and equinoxes.

Although some outsiders find Theurgic rituals mind-numbing in their complexity and repetitiveness, the chosen understand that *mindful* performance is what matters. The act of the ritual itself is not important unless it is done with all of one's attention, focus and passion. Merely going through the motions or reciting the words is not enough. Theurgists must inflame themselves through the ritual to reach the heights of the Aether.

Whatever the outward trappings, the ultimate purpose of these rituals is as a reminder of the Supernal World, to temporarily remove the mage from mundane reality.

Dedications

The Obrimos dedicate themselves to a higher calling, a scholarly or spiritual life of service to the greater glory of the truth as they understand it. That Obrimos choose dedications to enhance their calling, to turn their thoughts from the material and mundane world to the pure realm of Aether, the realm of thought, energy, the Supernal Light and the Fire of the Prime is not surprising then. Many of these oaths and practices have found their way into Sleeper religions, and many practices have likewise been adopted from Sleeper faiths, usually by Obrimos indoctrinated and initiated in them before they Awakened.

In general, Obrimos dedications involve denial of the material and mundane in favor of the intellectual or spiritual. They seek to sharpen the mind, focus the will and purify the spirit. The most common dedications on the Path include the following.

Celibacy

There is great power in the primal act of sexual congress, so some Obrimos choose to limit the sexual act, either keeping it within a sacred context of ritual or solemnized union, or abstaining altogether and channeling their sexual energies (what Reich called the "orgone") into sustaining the Great Work, producing Mana to serve the mage's need.

Among other mystics, particularly the Thyrsus, this practice has given the Obrimos a reputation as sexually repressed prudes. While there is some truth to the stereotype, most Theurgists see celibacy more as a matter of honoring sexuality as the tremendous power and responsibility that it is, treating it with the same respect they do all the other powers at their disposal. Sex is not a toy for recreation or idle amusement, as some others seem to treat it.

Charity

The Path of the Mighty is, fittingly enough, often a call to service. The Obrimos have long given of their gifts to others, and many continue to do so through the practice of charity. As a true dedication, charity is more than just tithing (although that is also a common practice among Theurgists). True charity is a gift of one's sweat, and Theurgists often espouse the virtues of honest work for others. In return, Theurgists reap a mystic rather than material reward.

Dedications to charitable work often go hand-in-hand with other Obrimos practices, including vows of poverty and a willingness to work for a cause. When Theurgists feel called to divest themselves of their material goods, they usually find a worthy cause where they can donate them (rather than simply destroying them, as other mages might be inclined to do).

Fasting

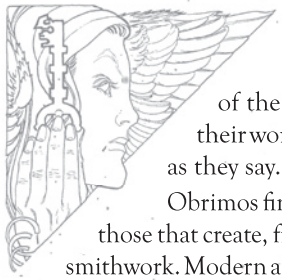
The purification of the body is food for the soul, or so say the great masters of the Path of the Mighty. Obrimos often embark on fasts in preparation for magical work, since a denial of earthly needs helps to clear and focus the mind.

While some esoteric (particularly Eastern) Obrimos subsist on special and simple diets at all times, most Theurgists fast only for short periods before ritual, or a week or so as an extended rite of purification, breaking their fast once they have performed the mystic working.

As with celibacy, this denial of the needs and pleasures of the body is seen as a condemnation of them by mages of other Paths. Ecstatic Shamans say the Obrimos dishonor the bounty of life by choosing not to partake, but the Theurgists point out that hunger is a most excellent spice to heighten their appreciation of what life has to offer, and their sympathy for those less fortunate than they. Obrimos honor life's bounty by abstaining, and thereby learning to appreciate it.

Labor

As Obrimos apprentices will groaningly attest, many Obrimos masters speak highly of the value of an honest day's labor. In Theurgist-run sanctums, there is *always* work to be done (although not always lowly apprentices to do it). While some Theurgists have reputations as lofty intellectuals who prefer to lift nothing heavier than a book, a fork or a goblet, others



of the chosen willingly throw themselves into their work. "Idle hands are the Devil's workshop," as they say.

Obrimos find magic in the simplest tasks, particularly those that create, from gardening to carpentry, masonry and smithwork. Modern and traditionalist Theurgists alike proclaim the mindless and soulless "labor" so often associated with employment all but useless as a magical rite. Labor is instead intended to debilitate the spirit and reinforce the Sleeping Curse. However, some mages do still find sparks of magic in creative service jobs: from cooking to computer programming to graphic design. If the mage can materially profit, so much the better, but the real rewards of the labor come in the form of Mana.

Mortification

The most extreme manifestation of the Obrimos emphasis of mind and spirit over mundane flesh comes in the mortification of the mortal clay. In times past, practices such as scourging, bloodletting, brutally long fasts and vigils and punishing exercise regimes were all used to draw attention away from the body and to the heart and mind.

Those days, mortification rituals are less popular among the Obrimos, out of fashion among younger mages and seen as relics of times past. The more intellectual and scholarly masters consider mortification a primitive practice, better suited to ecstatic Thyrsus or morbid Moros. The associations with the Path of Scourging and the Mastigos have also made such practices suspect to the chosen.

Still, the practice remains among the very oldest and newest strains of the Path of the Mighty. Obrimos traditionalists, particularly in isolated cloisters, still mortify their flesh to purify their spirits. Among the newest generation of Obrimos, extremes of body modification and "urban primitive" rituals are seen as ways of claiming mastery of mind over body, and there are technomancers interested in the potential of cybernetics and even complete body replacement. Of some concern is the widespread practice of mortification among Obrimos Banishers, who seek to purge themselves of sin and impurity.

Poverty

Theurgists tend to concern themselves more with riches of the mind and soul than of the material world. For some, "money is the root of all evil," and vows of poverty shield them from being corrupted by it. Others simply find material possessions a distraction along the Path, and advocate not becoming overly attached to them. They are ultimately unimportant, and the chosen find empowerment in recognizing this.

Living the simple life helps give the Mighty a sense of humility in the face of their power. Many great masters of the Path live as hermits, recluses or even homeless wanderers with nothing more than the clothes on their backs and the knowledge in their hearts and minds. Apprentices often go through periods of shedding material possessions, divesting themselves of a lifetime of mundane distractions before they can progress.

Silence

"Silence is golden," as they say, and the gold in this case is Mana, welling up from the deep, silent place within. For all the Theurgists' love of oratory and discussion, Theurgists value silence, and some take vows not to speak, or even to cut off all contact with the outside world for a time, retreating to the isolation of a cloister to contemplate, pray and go within. Without the constant noise and chatter, they can find peace and reach the true source of their magic.

Some Obrimos cloisters are utterly silent places of contemplation and prayer, the very air stretched thin by the quiet until it almost hums with potential. More than a few apprentices of the Path claim the practice of silence is more benefit to beleaguered masters than it is to their students, but cannot deny its compelling power.

Society: The View From on High

Like any of the various Paths, the Obrimos have a society only in the loosest sense. They are connected by their common initiation at the foot of the Watchtower of the Golden Key, and by their visions of the Realm of Aether, but beyond that they are a diverse and often fractious lot. Some Theurgists see their diverse faiths and experiences as unifying; others are concerned by how the diversity can divide the chosen.

Forums

One way the chosen try to bridge gaps between them is through forums. Indeed, Obrimos is one of the more likely Paths to hold a forum among its numbers (as opposed to caucuses of the mystic orders, which are far more common). Theurgists tend to be community-minded, even if they don't always get along among their own ranks.

The meeting place for an Obrimos forum is typically a Theurgist sanctum in the area, although smaller groups meet less formally wherever they can. The choice of meeting-place can sometimes be controversial, depending on the spiritual bent of the individual Theurgists; meeting in a local ashram or Catholic church may pose issues for some, for example. The forum is usually able to smooth over such differences.

Theurgists in an area gather to discuss matters of mutual interest and concern, ranging from spirited debates on theology and religion over drinks to sober discussions on how to best defend against threats to the Awakened, the chosen and the Sleeper community. Most Obrimos forums open with a general invocation to the Aether and the Supernal Light for blessing, protection and guidance. Full ceremonies are less common, usually reserved for recognizing important events, particularly initiations (or, far less often, casting out a member of the community).

Other Paths

The Obrimos view of the other Paths of the mages is best summarized by an ancient Obrimos interpretation of the mystic pentacle, as described earlier in this chapter. At the very summit of the star, the lone point high "above" the Fallen World, is the Realm of Aether and the Watchtower of the Golden Key. At the summit, shining down on all the Realms below, is a guiding beacon across the darkness of the void. This beacon has no paired opposite, no companion, no equal, but stands alone in the night.

So the Obrimos see their Path, and the view touches upon even the most humble of Theurgists. The other Paths draw upon powerful Supernal Realms, to be sure, and hold knowledge and secrets of value, but none other than the Path of the Mighty truly aspires to *soar*, to reach to the dizzying heights far above the Fallen World in the same way. Theirs is a Path of purity, encompassing the Prime Source. By comparison, anything else must be a pale reflection of the Supernal Light.

Acanthus

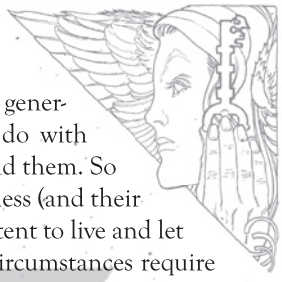
Enchanters are quick to bind others with oaths and promises, but reluctant to swear any of their own. This caution, coupled with the freewheeling nature of the Acanthus, makes them flighty and irresponsible by Obrimos standards. The Awakened's duty is to take up causes, not to flee from them or hide behind trickery and word games.

Acanthus lack focus and commitment, manipulating the threads of fate while avoiding getting caught up in them (or so the Acanthus think). Their feckless charm is usually lost on the Mighty, who do not have the luxury of assuming things will work out on their own with little more than hope and good wishes. Action is required, but Enchanters tend to prefer more subtle means than Theurgists, who believe the Prime flows through those who act (or, as the saying goes, "God helps those who help themselves").

Some Theurgists envy the Acanthus their faith. Those on the Path of the Thistle seem to drift through life like their namesake, without a care in the world, assured their thread weaves its way in and out of the Tapestry as intended. The chosen often spend their lives seeking the same assurance of their place in the divine plan, questioning, testing and tempering the faith that seems to come so easily to the fey-touched. Of course, few Obrimos would ever admit this, especially to an Enchanter.

Mastigos

Arrogant, selfish and amoral, the Warlocks are all that the Obrimos find distasteful in the Awakened. Relations between the two Paths are not helped by the fact that the qualities the Mighty claim they dislike so much in the Mastigos so often show up within their own ranks, something the Warlocks are all too quick to point out with smug smiles and mocking laughter.



Little surprise then that Theurgists generally don't care to have anything to do with Warlocks when the Obrimos can avoid them. So long as the Mastigos mind their business (and their manners), the Mighty are usually content to live and let live. Still, there are occasions when circumstances require mages of the two Paths to cooperate.

Dealing with Mastigos on equal terms usually involves knowing what the Warlocks want and finding mutually beneficial goals to agree upon. An Obrimos exorcist can find ways to work with a Mastigos demon hunter, for example, and Theurgist summoners find common cause with Warlock conjurers, although their methods may differ. Such alliances are nearly always temporary, although there have been exceptions.

Of course, when dealing with Warlocks on unequal footing, the Mighty are quick to use intimidation and bluster to get what they want, or to exercise the better part of valor and give the most powerful Mastigos a wide berth, for as long as their practices can be tolerated, at least.

Moros

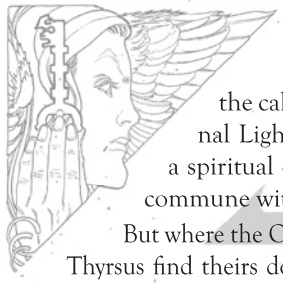
If the Obrimos strike sparks against the Mastigos, then they just shake their heads in pity and incomprehension when dealing with the Moros. The Path of Doom is in many ways the opposite of the Theurgists' experience and understanding of the Supernal Realm. Necromancers are so tied to the mundane, material world, so fascinated with death, doom and decay rather than the soaring heights and wonders of Primal Creation, the eternal life and vitality of the world.

The Arcana of the Moros are only shadows of the powers of the Mighty. Necromancers shape and mold gross matter where Theurgists draw upon the *prima materia* and the Ideals of the higher realms. Necromancers infuse corpses with shadowy unlife while the masters of the Golden Key imbue the living with Mana or create entirely new forms of energy. The Moros plumb the dark depths of death, ignoring the divine gift of life. To the Obrimos, the Moros are wandering, lost and alone, in the darkness.

Of course, the Moros do not look kindly on efforts to "enlighten" them on this point — so many Obrimos don't even bother. If the Necromancers cannot see the higher aspects of reality, so be it. So long as they remain in their dark corners and don't cause trouble, there's no need for the chosen to respond. Those Necromancers who choose to defile the dead or, worse yet, prey on the living, discover the power and glory of the Supernal Fire firsthand, to their regret.

Thyrsus

The Shamans of the Path of Ecstasy fascinate and repel Theurgists at the same time. Of all the other Paths, the Thyrsus are the closest to the Mighty, on the Twilight boundaries of civilization rather than in the darkness beyond. They also feel



the call of spirit, although not the same Supernal Light of the Aether. Shamans acknowledge a spiritual existence as well as a material one, and commune with spiritual powers.

But where the Obrimos seek a higher spiritual calling, the Thyrsus find theirs down in the mud and blood of the Fallen World. Their light is to the Obrimos as the light of the Moon is to the glory of the Sun: shadowy, dim and mysterious. They remind the Mighty of the barbarians their ancestors worked for countless ages to enlighten and raise up from the morass of their animal passions. The Shamans have an admirable strength, insight and dedication, if only they were more lofty and refined and not so bound up in the physical. They lack the moral center of the Theurgists, the peace and understanding of the Celestial Realm.

Still, Theurgist and Shaman have fought and served side by side, safeguarding their people and guiding them in the Mysteries of the divine. The strongest connections between the two Paths are found deep at their roots, where philosophy is set aside in the interest of practicality. Adamantine Arrows of both Paths in particular recognize each other as passionate, forceful and valiant warriors, equals on the field of battle, whether they fight side by side or in opposite camps. Likewise, mages of the Mysterium from both Paths often recognize the things they share in common, while debating the finer points of disagreement. Silver Ladder théarchs of either Path, however, tend to turn their noses up at the other: the Theurgists because the Shamans are filthy, rutting barbarians, the Shamans because the Theurgists are prissy, moralistic prudes.

Orders

Theurgists are found in all five of the mystic orders in roughly equal measure. Although, in ancient times, the Obrimos were best known among the Adamantine Arrow and the Silver Ladder, while in more recent years Free Councilors following the Path of the Mighty have become increasingly common. Each mage chooses to join an order for his or her own reasons, but Obrimos are often called to the orders in certain ways.

Adamantine Arrow

Straight and true to the heart, the Adamantine Arrow mages have long called to the chosen of the Path of the Mighty. Many renowned warriors were Obrimos, champions of the light who stood against the darkness that would threaten humanity. Although exalted by their Awakening, they humbly served both their brethren and those less fortunate and in need of their power.

The noble and shining knight is the most common image of the Obrimos Arrow, a warrior crowned in glory, wielding purifying light and fire against all foes. They have a reputation for fighting to the last, willing to sacrifice everything for their cause. Since the beginning, Obrimos Arrows have been known as monster-slayers, the heroes who seek out dragons and ogres in their dens and strike them down with sword and flame.

Free Council

The Free Council has long called Theurgists seeking to cast off the dogma of the past and embrace the knowledge and insight they know awaits them. Indeed, a great many of the mages who initially formed the Free Council came from a schism between tradition and modernity within the Path of the Mighty. The Free Council has drawn the attacks of Obrimos traditionalists proclaiming its ways foolish and even heretical in the face of the Path's ancient and honored history.

Obrimos Councilors are filled with the fire of the imagination, the spark of creativity. They have visions of the Golden Spire as the shining city of the future — the utopia that is attainable through their discoveries and exploration. In the Prime Source, they see the Implicate Order of all Creation, the great secret to explain everything, if only they can understand it. They tend to disdain the title "theurgist" (implying connection with a god-force) and prefer "enlightened" or "philosopher," dealing more with matters of the mind and imagination.

Energy is the tool and medium of the Councilors of the Mighty, from electricity to subtle radiation to the most primal forces of the cosmos. Energy is ultimately what makes up everything in the Tapestry, and Free Council philosophers, seeking understanding, delve down into the deepest levels of creation, where reality dissolves into quantum chaos.

Guardians of the Veil

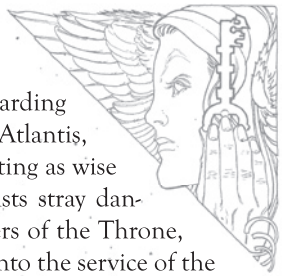
There are truths too terrible for most minds to bear, things lurking in the shadows more horrifying than a Sleeper's worst nightmares. Standing on the Twilight border between the darkness and the light are a few lone guardians, safeguarding humanity from the creatures of the dark, which sometimes includes the inheritors of Atlantis themselves.

Obrimos Guardians strike a balance between separating themselves from their charges and living among them and ministering to their needs. Obrimos Guardians are the keepers of the sacred hearth fires, the ones who keep the lanterns lit to hold off whatever lurks out in the shadows. These Obrimos live within a community but are not entirely part of it, elevated but also isolated by their calling.

Some Obrimos Guardians are sympathetic figures, but even they can be ruthless in carrying out their sacred duty. Like a doctor amputating a limb or cutting cancer from the body, Theurgist Guardians are willing to sacrifice a part to save the whole. If a demon-possessed child must perish so its evil cannot spread, then such is the burden the chosen accept as their duty. Theurgist Guardians are known to cauterize wounds they cannot close and to cut out corruption before it can threaten the body of a community.

Mysterium

Theurgists are among the chosen few, for enlightenment is not for every soul in the world. Still, it is the Obrimos' re-



sponsibility to bring the light into the darkness and to shelter the light against the storm. Their light should not be hidden, for it is the hope of the Fallen World, but if hiding the light beneath a bushel ensures the light will not fade from the world, then it must be so. Obrimos mystagogues work within this paradox, balancing the need to preserve the knowledge and enlightenment of the Awakened from the forces of ignorance and the Lie against the duty to enlighten and guide the Sleepers, without revealing too much too soon.

Theurgist mystagogues harken back to the leaders of mystery religions in the ancient world, who dolled out the secrets of the faith to those the leaders judged ready to learn them. Theurgist mystagogues were the philosophers teaching a gathering of students, as well as the sages and learned mystics who gathered dusty tomes and scrolls to safeguard them.

Some find mystagogues on the Path of the Mighty arrogant because of their tendency to believe they know what is best. They seem to lord their superior knowledge over others, passing judgment from the security of their ivory towers. From their perspective, this view is inevitable, and they must overlook the opinions of the ignorant, focusing instead on the Great Work, patiently cultivating new members to join their ranks, like blowing gently on the embers of a fading fire.

This very split between hoarding and valuing ancient lore and the burning desire to learn, explore and share information led some Obrimos to join the Free Council, and a rivalry of sorts remains between the two orders among Theurgists to this day. Obrimos mystagogues consider Free Council philosophers of their Path foolishly idealistic while the enlightened see the Mysterium Theurgists as hidebound and outdated.

Silver Ladder

Those called to the Watchtower of the Golden Key are raised up, above the ordinary masses, gifted with extraordinary power and insight into the nature of things. However, they are elevated so they may serve a higher calling in the name of the Sleepers, who do not and cannot know of the champions of their cause until the time has come to cast off the Lie and reveal the Invisible Truth to all.

Théarchs of the Mighty wear the divine right of kings like a shining mantle. The best of these Mighty are humbled by their divine calling and the responsibility placed in their hands: to lead humanity on the path to glory. For the théarchs, the vision of the Golden Spire is a glimpse at what can be for all, and the Supernal Light is the unwavering beacon of the Realm of Aether. They will forge a path to Heaven, or bring Heaven down to Earth, to bridge the gap between the Fallen and Supernal Worlds.

Of course, not all chosen théarchs are so humble. Some of the most prideful and dogmatic mages of the Silver Ladder are Obrimos, precisely because their pride and conviction stems from a divine mandate, and who can deny its authority? They are more interested in safeguarding their position among the inheritors of Atlantis, and enforcing the status quo than acting as wise stewards of humanity. Such Theurgists stray dangerously close to the views of the Seers of the Throne, and some Obrimos have been lured into the service of the Exarchs because of it.

Sleepers

It is said that teaching a student is not filling a vessel, but igniting a flame. So it is with Theurgists and the Sleepers, but both sides must always be careful not to get burned.

Theurgists seek to protect and inspire the Sleepers, to help rouse them to wakefulness as much as they can without suffering the punishment of the Sleeping Curse. The Obrimos' duty is to bring the light of understanding, hope and guidance into the darkness of ignorance, fear and despair.

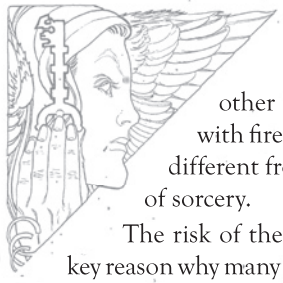
Throughout history, Sleepers have confused the messenger with the message, the Supernal Light with those who wield it, and their worship and awe has poisoned the chosen with pride on many occasions. Theurgists already consider themselves among the elect, so not much is needed to inflate their sense of pride in their accomplishments and abilities. There is a fine line between Sleeper students, parishioners or dependents and a Sleeper cult, and Obrimos sometimes step over that line.

The truth is it is harder to humbly inspire by example while trying to explain the Invisible Truth than it is to take charge and hand out simple dogma and easy answers. Even Theurgists with the best of intentions slip up, and all it takes is a misinterpreted statement or order for things to get out of control.

Banishers

That so many Banishers walk the Path, something mages of other Paths are quick to point out, embarrasses the Obrimos. This has led to mistrust between the chosen and the other inheritors of Atlantis in the past. While some Obrimos are quick to police their own ranks, others have wondered in private if the Banishers of the Path of the Mighty haven't occasionally done the world a service in ridding the world of certain mages, particularly less scrupulous Mastigos and Moros. Rumors of such opinions have done little to improve the attitudes of other mages toward the Path of the Mighty.

For their part, Banishers who Awaken as Obrimos have little difficulty interpreting their experience as a religious or spiritual revelation. Unlike Banishers of other Paths, Obrimos Banishers tend to be the least conflicted. They don't necessarily consider the Awakening a curse, but a blessing, a divine mandate, even. Whereas the initiations of Mastigos, Moros or Thyrsus Banishers are often traumatic, nightmarish and deeply disturbing, Obrimos Banishers can rationalize their Awakening as something different, pure and divine. Whereas



other Banishers believe they're "fighting fire with fire," many Obrimos see their gifts as wholly different from the "corrupt" and "devilish" powers of sorcery.

The risk of the newly chosen becoming Banishers is a key reason why many Theurgists become teachers, seeking out fledgling Theurgists to help guide them. It's also the reason why Obrimos warrior-mages are so aggressive in hunting down the mage-killers; the Obrimos see in Banishers a twisted reflection of the Theurgists' own Path.

Character Creation

When creating an Obrimos character, consider the nature of the character's calling or purpose. What does the mage feel is his or her duty or responsibility in the world? While not all Theurgists are duty-minded, a great many of them are and feel they have a divine mandate to carry out their chosen task. Give some thought as to what your characters will be, working off the examples in this section.

Any of the three categories of Attributes may be primary for a Theurgist, depending on the character's background and concept. Obrimos often have a powerful Presence, they're well known for their Composure and Resolve is their favored Resistance Attribute.

Mages on the Path of the Mighty often have high Willpower scores, although no particular Willpower score is required for a character to be Obrimos. Some Theurgists develop their Willpower and Resolve with experience over time as they walk their Path.

Character Concepts

Strength of spirit is the key quality of the chosen of the Golden Spire, so Obrimos come from all walks of life and all parts of the Fallen World, from the halls of power to desolate regions of crushing poverty and injustice. Some Obrimos are people of faith, while others are searching for something and find it at the gates of the Watchtower. Given here is a sample of the typical roles filled by Theurgists, although these are by no means the only concepts for Obrimos characters.

Artificer

Although the Moros have the greatest affinity for the sphere of Matter, the Obrimos have the greatest affinity for true craftsmanship, and particularly for infusing their creations with a spark of the *prima materia,* making Theurgists among the finest artificers. Crafting, particularly smithwork, is regarded as some of the first magic, and many Obrimos tell how they are the ones who first took fire to metal, shaped it by hand, made it both useful and beautiful and filled it with primal energies from the Supernal Realms. Modern artificers are also as likely to be engineers or mechanics as they are smiths or masters of ancient handicrafts.

Inventor

Closely related to the Obrimos' ancient role as artificers, Theurgists are also inventors by nature, taking the essential ideas, the Ideals of the Aether and bringing them into being in the Fallen World. For some, the Obrimos are inventions of philosophy, the world of ideas, but for other Obrimos, only seeing their work in physical form will do. Of course, with the power of magic behind them, the inventions of the chosen can defy scientific theories and understanding, and some Free Councilors have found magical applications for scientific theories discarded on the trash heap of history.

Monster-Hunter

There are monsters in the world, to be sure, things hidden from the everyday sight of Sleepers that prey upon the unwitting before disappearing back into the shadows. The chosen wield the power to expose these threats, to hunt them down and destroy them — or, at the very least, drive them back into the darkness from whence they came. Since ancient times, heroes on the Path of the Mighty have fought and slain monsters, and Obrimos continue to do so in the modern world. Of course, the monsters have become more cunning and better at hiding their true nature, while the Sleeping Curse forces the hunters to move cautiously.

Protector

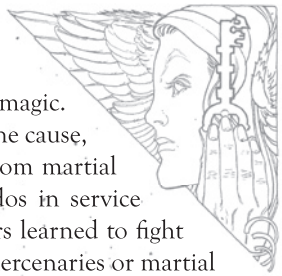
Where monster-hunters seek out things lurking in the night, other Theurgists prefer to linger close to the edges of the light, safeguarding the unsuspecting Sleepers. Obrimos protectors guard against more than just supernatural threats: the Obrimos also serve communities, neighborhoods, cities or even nations. Professions such as police officer, firefighter, soldier and the like often call to the Obrimos, although other Theurgists prefer to work alone, with only the authority invested in them by their Path and their Awakening.

Priest

For the Path of the Mighty, "priest" is interpreted in its broadest possible context: serving as a bridge or medium between the mortal and divine, between the Fallen and Supernal Worlds. The exact religious beliefs vary, although Obrimos are often drawn to monotheistic or transcendent faiths that match their experiences of the Aether. What matters most is the role of the chosen in bringing the divine word to others. For some, the experience of Awakening has a moderating effect on their faith, showing there are many different Paths to the Invisible Truth. For others, Awakening inspires a depth of religious devotion, even fanaticism, rarely seen among Sleepers.

Purifier

These zealots see imperfection in some belief, behavior or deed of others, and they see it as their duty to rectify such wrongs. The first stage is usually persuasion and leading through example. If the "impure" person does not change his ways, stronger measures are called for, such as threats or damage to the person's property or standing. If even these don't alter the perceived wrong, the



purifier feels justified in wounding or even killing the offender. A purifier might be a Church inquisitor, a cop or the whip for a political party — any sort of role that allows the purifier to exert her will over others with some degree of justification.

Teacher

Theurgists carry the light of inspiration into the darkness, and some are called to bring that light to those in need. While many Theurgists consider themselves priests of one faith or another, other Obrimos see their duty to enlighten as a matter of philosophy or personal conviction, not religious or spiritual belief. They may be philosophers or scientists trying to banish the shadows of ignorance, reality-hackers breaking preconceptions and sowing new ideas or peaceful warriors bringing a new perspective on old problems, cutting through Gordian knots with a single, swift stroke. Ultimately, Theurgist teachers hope to enlighten their students, to free them from the Lie and guide them to seek the Invisible Truth in their own way.

Warrior

Many Obrimos see it as their duty to fight against the forces preying upon humanity, and to protect the legacy of Atlantis from destruction and corruption by the servants of the Exarchs and other sinister legacies of magic. So some Theurgists take up arms in the cause, becoming mystic warriors, ranging from martial arts masters to Awakened commandos in service to the Light. Some Theurgist warriors learned to fight before their Awakening as soldiers, mercenaries or martial arts students, while others take up the way of the warrior after their initiation.

New Merits

Higher Calling (●●)

Prerequisite: Resolve • • •

Effect: Your character is especially devoted to a particular cause or purpose, gaining +1 die for Resolve rolls to resist coercion that runs counter to his calling. This only affects Resolve rolls, not Willpower or other Traits, and does not affect coercion that doesn't involve the character's Higher Calling.

Drawbacks: If your character ever acts in a way contrary to his calling or abandons his dedication to it, the Storyteller may even remove this Merit.

Ascended Adept

Mages tend to be fairly cerebral; after all, knowledge literally is power for the Awakened, and their thoughts do indeed shape reality. Some willworkers, however, place the mind and its innate powers above all else, and make the refinement of the mind their ultimate goal. Having already transcended the mundane through their initiation at the Watchtowers, they come to regard all mundane things as hindrances to overcome. The body is merely an encumbrance to the enlightened mind.

To the Ascended Adept, those who focus on perfecting the body as a means of attaining understanding miss the point. The body is only a vehicle for the mind. While you can certainly breed a better and faster horse over time, why not build yourself a rocket ship instead and leave your old, outdated mode of transportation behind? If you weigh yourself down with the limitations of humanity and mortality, how can you ever truly ascend?

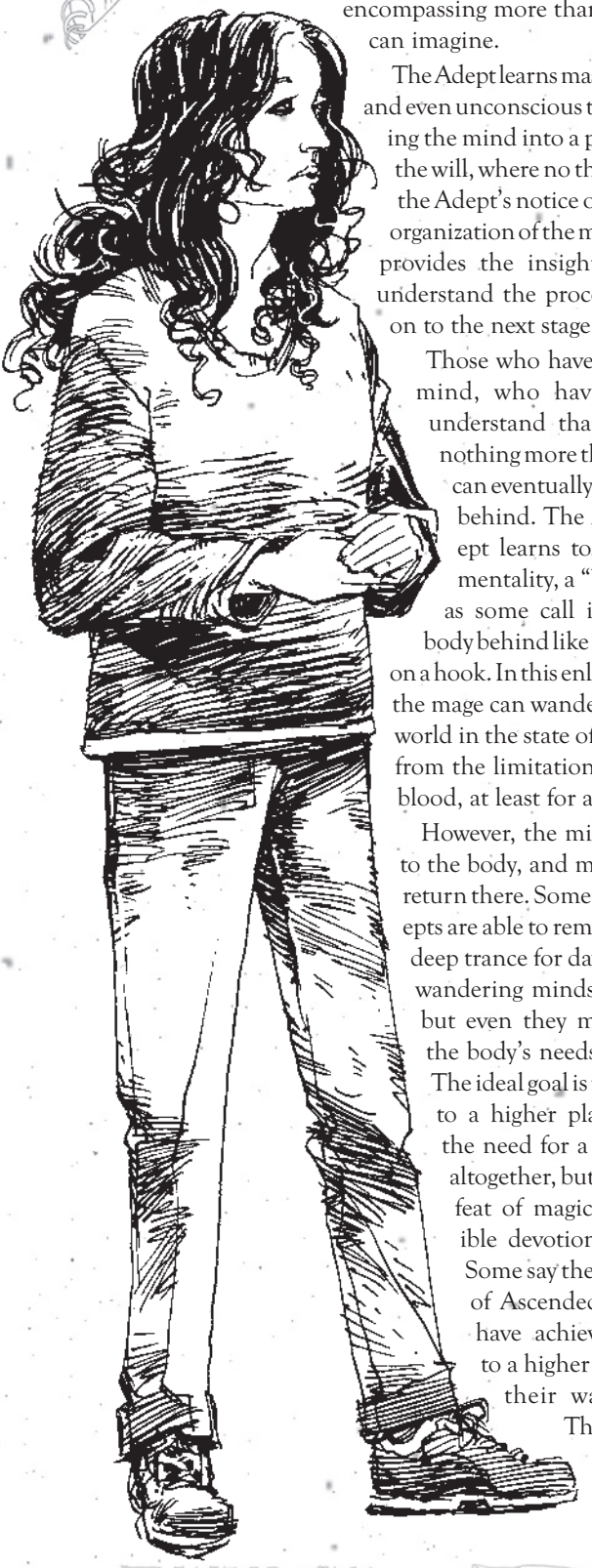
The Ascended Adept is an acorn that does not fear destroying itself in order to grow into an oak. Mages cannot remain within the safety of their shells; they must stretch out, reach beyond their limits and rise toward the light of the Supernal Realm, leaving material things behind. Anything else is simply delusion, crafting a fine and gilded cage in the confines of the Fallen World. Only the essential self, the mind, the portion that says "I AM," is real and can transcend.

The process begins with learning to discipline the mind and overcome the lies that bind it. An untrained mind is chaotic, filled with uncontrolled thoughts and desires, ruled by the needs of the body. The training of the Ascended Adept quiets the tumult, calms the chaos, and enthrones the will above all. Ascended Adepts learn to meditate and reach a deep place of inner peace, allowing them to remain calm in the most difficult circumstances. They also build the strength of will to resist the outside influences that bombard the mind.

In achieving this discipline, the Adept sheds connections with the physical. Material possessions are discarded, save for those necessary for the work. Physical needs are mastered and controlled; physical relationships are allowed to fall away in favor of intellectual and spiritual communion. Some Ascended Adepts retire to cloistered communities or hermitages during the early stages of their training, to gain the perspective and peace needed for their work. Others have a talent for standing alone even in the midst of a crowd, and do not need any such assistance.

Once the foundations are laid, the Adept can begin refining and improving the capabilities of the mind. When quiet and clear of distractions, the mind has remarkable powers. The Adept learns to wander the halls of memory, ordering and recalling things at will, improving the ability to memorize large amount of information. Mental training allows Adepts

to think about multiple things at once, creating complex thought processes modern mages liken to parallel computer processing. The thoughts of the Ascended Adept are both deep and broad, encompassing more than most people can imagine.



The Adept learns mastery of dreams and even unconscious thoughts, making the mind into a palace ruled by the will, where no thought escapes the Adept's notice or control. The organization of the mental faculties provides the insight required to understand the process of moving on to the next stage.

Those who have mastered the mind, who have learned to understand that the body is nothing more than its vehicle, can eventually leave the body behind. The Ascended Adept learns to exist as pure mentality, a "being of light" as some call it, leaving the body behind like a coat hanging on a hook. In this enlightened state, the mage can wander the material world in the state of Twilight, free from the limitations of flesh and blood, at least for a time.

However, the mind is still tied to the body, and must eventually return there. Some Ascended Adepts are able to remain in states of deep trance for days before their wandering minds must return, but even they must attend to the body's needs on occasion. The ideal goal is to truly ascend to a higher plane, shedding the need for a physical body altogether, but such a mighty feat of magic takes incredible devotion and insight. Some say the apparent lack of Ascended Adepts who have achieved ascension to a higher plane is proof their way is flawed. The Adepts counter that the things truly worth doing are rarely ever easy. If everyone could transcend, they would have done so. If transcendence involves moving beyond the limits of the Fallen World, then few Ascended beings will be found there.

There are Ascended Adepts who say they have encountered the "Secret Masters" of their Legacy, abiding deep in the realms of thoughts and dreams, and that these enlightened few still guide those on the Path to achieving what they have attained. Outsiders are less sanguine about such tales, and speculate instead as to who — or what — these so-called Secret Masters may be. After all, the Exarchs may be said to have "ascended" as well, and there are more than a few Ascended Adepts among the Seers of the Throne.

Parent Path or Order: Obrimos

Nicknames: Gnostics, Ascetics

Appearance: Ascended Adepts tend to pay little attention to appearances, since the material world is little more than illusion to them, something to be shunned. So their clothes are simple and well worn or even unkempt and ragged (assuming the Adept doesn't simply go without garments altogether). Jewelry and other adornments are likewise rare, since material things have no intrinsic value. Hair tends to be either worn long or completely shorn. In either case, Ascended Adepts pay little heed to their hair. Some Adepts understand the importance of keeping up appearances for the sake of others, but even these mages have little attachment to their looks. They're like chameleons: changing appearance and manner to suit whatever situation they're in, without any particular attachment to their appearance.

Background: Ascended Adepts tend to be cerebral, thoughtful and well educated. They come from virtually all walks of life, but most often find their way to the Legacy through intellectual or spiritual pursuits, from transcendent philosophy or spirituality to post-modern transhumanism.

Organization: Ascended Adepts organize in a hierarchy based on how "far" one has ascended along the Path toward the ultimate goal of transcendence. Thus, Adepts who have reached the higher Attainments of the Legacy are regarded with great respect and admiration. They have little direct authority (one of the Legacy's tenets is that each individual is the master of his or her mind, and therefore own destiny), but those who follow in their footsteps often heed their advice or seek out elders as teachers and gurus. The "Secret Masters" of the Legacy are said to have departed the Fallen World altogether, existing solely in the Shadow Realm, the depths of the Temenos or even beyond. The legendary Oracles are often associated with these Secret Masters, mages who have transcended physical existence, but, as others observe, the same could be said of the Exarchs.

Suggested Oblations: Lengthy meditation (including focusing on two or more different things at once), study and reading, prayer and chanting, mental exercises intended to sharpen

perception and memory, forsaking physical needs (such as eating or sleeping) to demonstrate mastery over the body

Concepts: Cloistered priest, computer programmer, cyberpunk, Gnostic, Cabalist, New Age guru, mystic, scholar, transhumanist

Attainments

The process of ascension begins with learning how to discipline and quiet the mind, building what Adepts call "the Inner Temple," a place of silence and contemplation within, as well as a sanctuary from outside influences. Ascension progresses with the subdivision of the Inner Temple into halls honeycombed with chambers, each holding a particular idea or recollection. Called "the Palace of Memory," this allows the Adept to order his mind and think more efficiently. Some connect the Palace of Memory with the Akashic Records, the universal memory. Finally, Ascended Adepts learn to transcend the body, freeing the mind to act on its own. The legendary fourth Attainment for true Ascended Masters is to eliminate the need for the body altogether, existing as pure mind and spirit, but such an achievement lies beyond the first degrees of the Legacy.

1st: Inner Temple

Prerequisites: Willpower 5, Gnosis 3, Mind 2

The Ascended Adept learns to master the mind, gaining the benefits of the Meditative Mind Merit (see p. 109 in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). He also gains the benefits of a permanent Mind 2 "Mental Shield," subtracting his dots in the Mind Arcanum from mind-influencing spells or supernatural powers, and allowing the Adept to see through illusions and other psychic forms of deception.

Optional Arcanum: Dream 1

If the mage has at least one dot of the Dream Merit (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 82), he can speak words telepathically to a sleeping target via what seem to the target to be dreams, similar to the Mind 2 "Voices From Afar" spell. Only targets who are asleep can be affected.

2nd: Palace of Memory

Prerequisites: Gnosis 5, Mind 3

The mage refines and frees her mind from mundane limits. She gains the Eidetic Memory Merit. (See pp. 108–109 in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**; this is an exception to the rule against gaining this Merit after character creation.) In addition, the Adept can compartmentalize her mind, allowing her to perform up to three Mental extended actions or two Mental instant actions simultaneously, such as a use of the Mind 3 "Multi-Tasking" spell, but always in effect and requiring no effort from the Adept. Just as Multi-Tasking, this Ability does not allow the Ascended Adept to cast multiple spells at once, since magic is more than just a Mental action.

Optional Merit: Dream 3

Through an innate connection to the Akashic Records, the universal memory spoken of in various occult sources, the mage with three dots of Dream and this Attainment can understand any language, similar to the Mind 3 "Universal Language" spell. The mage must first spend an instant action accessing the Records, rolling Wits + Investigation, modified by any dice bonus or penalty due to the alien-ness or obscurity of the language or concepts (which might be from –1 to –3).

3rd: Transcendent Form

Prerequisites: Gnosis 7, Mind 4

At this level of development, the Ascended Adept's body is like a garment, to be worn or doffed virtually at will. This works like the spell Mind 4 "Psychic Projection," allowing the Adept's mind to wander in the state of Twilight free of the limitations of the body. To do so, he makes an instant Composure + Investigation roll, but he does not need to spend Mana.

The Ascended Adept has not completely transcended the need for a body, however, and the mind must eventually return to it. Those Adepts who have attempted to transcend by simply not returning to their bodies have become ghosts — mere shadows of their former selves — rather than the permanent enlightened state they hoped to achieve. The true Ascended Masters are said to have attained this enlightened state but, if so, it is beyond this level of Attainment.

Optional Merit: Dream 5

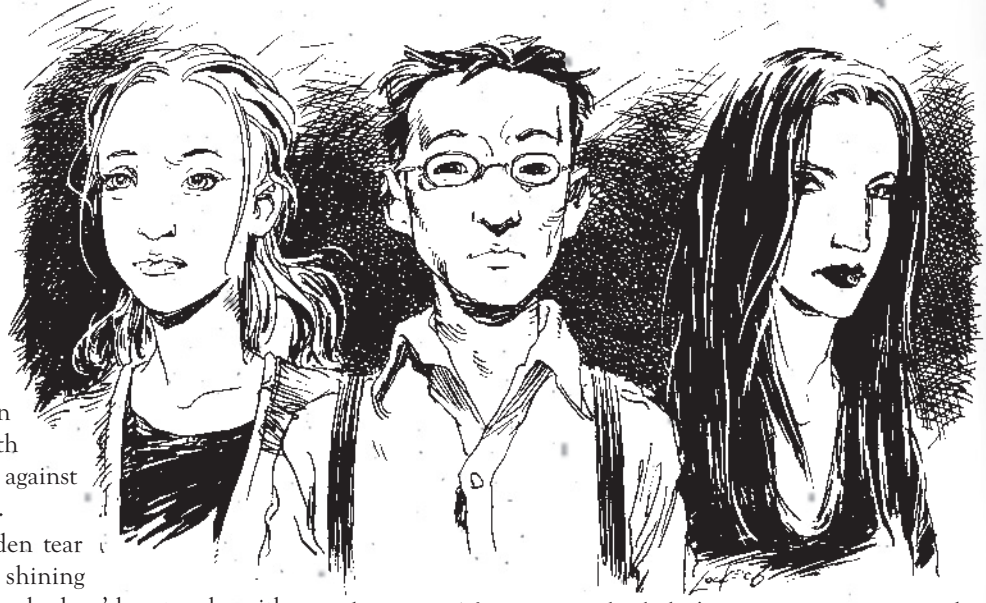
Ascended Adepts with the Dream Merit at 5 dots and this level of Attainment can also enter the dreams of others, similar to the Mind 4 "Dream Traveler" spell. Unlike that spell, this aspect of the Attainment also allows the mage to enter a target's Oneiros, his personal astral dream realm, as if he were entering his own.

Obrimos Characters

Sister Mary Angelica

Quote: *Are you in need of shelter? All are welcome in the house of God.*

Background: Raised in a large, conservative, Catholic family, Mary Angelica (her name in religion also serves as her shadow name) often sought solace and sanctuary in her faith. She underwent a terrible crisis of faith when an indiscretion as a teenager caused her to become pregnant. She gave up the child for adoption, but the shame of the incident kept her from being able to face her family. As penance, seeking some meaning in her life, she entered religious orders to become a nun. There, she found far more than she imagined when a religious vision became her initiation at the Watchtower of the Golden Key.



Description: Now well into middle age, Mary Angelica still retains the grace of her youth, tempered with experience. Her dark eyes are filled with compassion, and her smile is a comforting reassurance to those in need. Those same eyes can flash with fire, her mouth set with determination when she struggles against some twisted spawn of the Abyss.

Her nimbus appears as a golden tear running down her left check, shining with a luminescence that makes onlookers' hearts ache with an indefinable longing.

Storytelling Hints: Mary Angelica has known loss in her time. She has tended the sick and comforted the dying. She has defended the weak and seen good people willing to sacrifice themselves for what they believed in. All of this has given her a certain melancholy air, but also a deep and abiding strength and determination. She tends to be soft-spoken and diplomatic, but her voice can crack like a whip and she doesn't hesitate to use the powers at her command to do what she believes is right.

Path: Obrimos

Order: Silver Ladder

Abilities:

Empathy (dice pool 8) — An excellent listener and judge of character, Sister Mary Angelica knows how to make people feel at ease, and they in turn tend to tell her their problems and worries. She immediately knows if and when someone is trustworthy or dangerous.

First Aid (dice pool 7) — Although she has limited formal medical training, Mary Angelica has learned a great deal about the healing arts over the years and she's a good field medic. She can use magic to heal but prefers simple and practical treatments first.

Persuasion (dice pool 7) — The good sister is a persuasive speaker, and her gentle tones can often convince people to take the right course of action, sometimes in spite of themselves.

Kanji

Quote: *I'd say it's simple, but it really isn't, so just try and keep up, okay?*

Background: Thomas Nakamura always loved computers. They certainly made more sense than most people he knew, and were a lot easier to get along with. He also loved to read and had an active imagination as a child, something his parents didn't particularly encourage. They wanted Thomas to do well in school and in life, not spend his time daydreaming. After earning a bachelor's in computer science and a master's degree in computer programming, Thomas found work in the burgeoning high-tech industry, but later lost his job in the dot-com bust. He barely noticed because his experiments in fractal geometry triggered something, and Thomas Awakened to a higher truth. Forethought Research later contacted him about a job opportunity, and a chance to learn more.

Description: A Japanese American in his late 20s, Kanji usually wears business suits with suspenders over his dress shirt. He usually takes off his jacket indoors and often has his tie either loosened or doesn't bother to wear one. His dark hair is cut conservatively short, and he wears oval-shaped, steel-rimmed glasses.

Storytelling Hints: Kanji is excited by the new world that has opened up to him. He tends to look at magic as an unexplored vista of science and doesn't care for a lot of magic's traditional trappings. His thinks quickly and speaks almost as fast when he's excited about something. He values intellect above all else and has a tendency to speak down to those he considers his intellectual inferiors.

Path: Obrimos

Order: Free Council

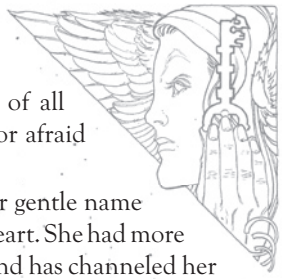
Abilities:

Program Computers (dice pool 9) — Kanji is an expert computer programmer and software designer. Given time, he can figure out most software problems or write simple programs to handle various tasks. More complex programs take more time and effort.

Research (dice pool 8) — Kanji's preferred method of research is the Internet, of course, but he's becoming quite adept at pulling together information from hardcopy sources, particularly as he tries to study what he calls the "root elements" of magical tradition, looking for the scientific truths at their heart.

Lily

Quote: *My authority comes from the Consilium and the Lex Magica, but my authority to deal with the likes of you comes from*



a higher power.

Background: Catherine Milane never considered herself religious, although with an Algerian father and a French Canadian mother, she certainly had no lack of exposure to religion. Still, her parents broke the conventions of their faiths to marry, so Catherine always saw religion as something to be ignored, an exception rather than a rule. Of course, her attitude didn't always sit well with the faculty at the Catholic-run girls' school she attended, and Catherine had a reputation for cheerfully flouting authority.

She never thought about the risks of having fun until one night at a party when a popular jock at school who had pursued Catherine tried to rape her. She managed to escape at the last minute, but her story was dismissed as a petulant tantrum. Although she tried to press charges, Catherine was underage and had been drinking at the party, and her reputation — the District Attorney's office recommended against taking the case to court and putting Catherine through cross-examination. She insisted, and stood up through the trial, only to see her attacker go free. After that, Catherine started taking self-defense classes and volunteering at a shelter for battered women. She also worked hard in her senior year to get into college. She wanted to go to law school and be someone to help provide real justice for women who were victimized.

In her first year of law school, Catherine became aware of someone stalking her. She dismissed it at first, trying to convince herself it was coincidence or her own paranoia, but she kept seeing the same man: in a crowd at a local club, across the quad late at night. She tried to find out who he was, but couldn't. Then, walking to her car late at night, she had the overwhelming feeling of being followed. She ran, he pursued and cornered her. Despite all her training and preparation for the moment, Catherine felt a deep surge of panic. For the second time in her life, she prayed for help and guidance, and her prayers were answered.

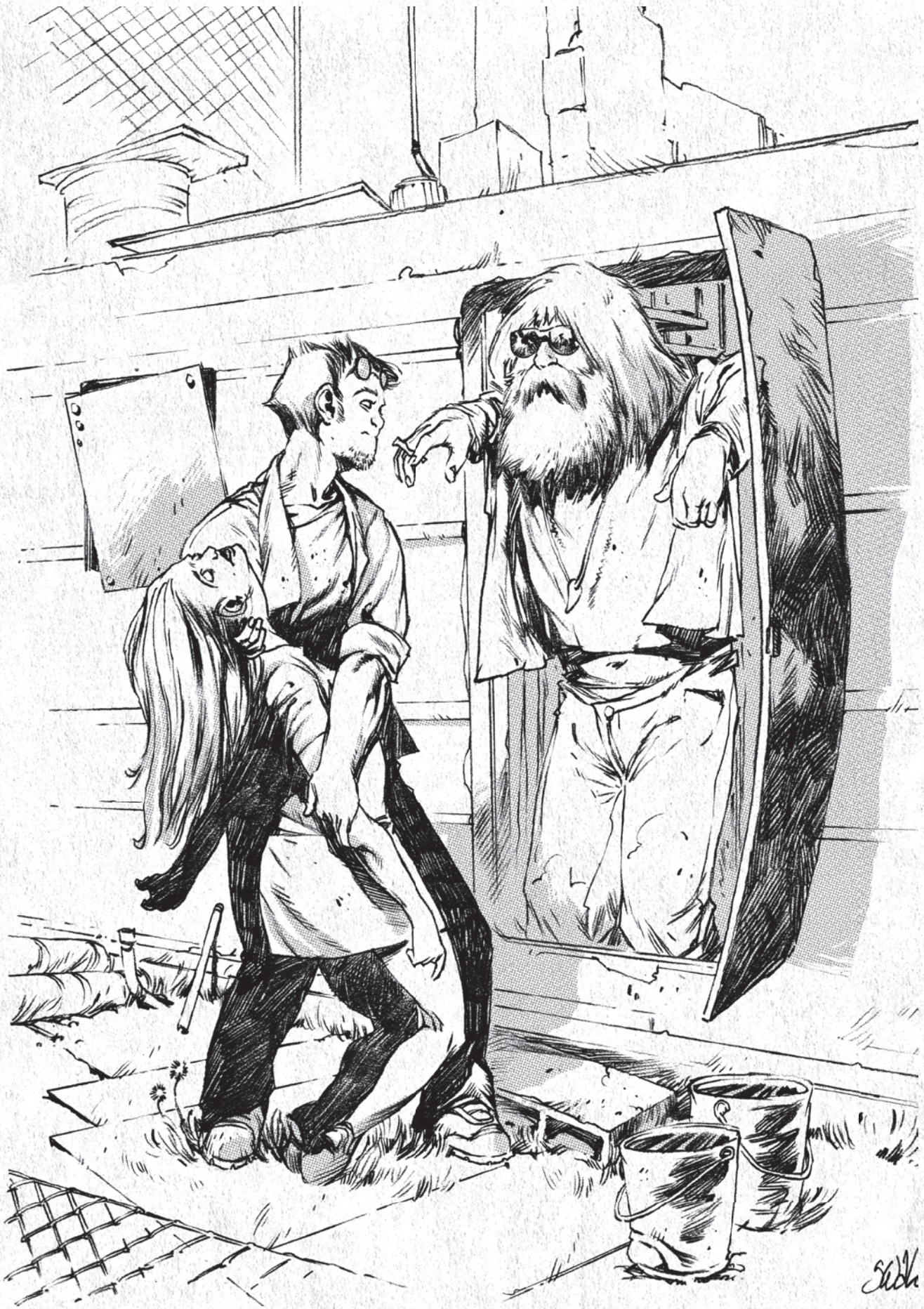
Thunder crashed overhead, and a ray of light as bright as the sun split the darkness of the night. Her attacker vanished in a howl of pain, reduced to smoldering ashes in an instant as Catherine felt the light enfold her and lift her up. She fainted. She dreamed of a majestic tower, glowing with light, of placing her name in burning letters of gold into its walls. Sentinels of the Consilium found her, smoothed over matters with the police, and saw to her training. In time, Lily became a Sentinel as well as an attorney, still seeking justice for those in need.

Description: Lily is a striking French Mediterranean woman with long, straight black hair, black eyes and a tanned, olive complexion. She's fairly tall and keeps in very fit shape by running, practicing martial arts and exercising. She dresses in business fashion — pantsuits in particular — when working, but opts for more casual clothes on her own time, usually jeans and a simple pullover or sweater.

Her nimbus speeds the heartbeat of all witnesses, who feel nervous, excited or afraid by the rush.

Storytelling Hints: Lily, despite her gentle name and appearance, is a fierce warrior at heart. She had more than enough of feeling like a victim, and has channeled her anger to make her a formidable presence. She's kind and fun-loving with friends, deadly serious when it comes to her work and her duties. She hates to see anyone suffer, particularly the weak and helpless. She's just as capable in a verbal confrontation as she is in a physical one — passionately arguing her point of view. Although, she has learned to respect authority and the law from her younger days and does bow to the will of the Consilium.

Dedicated Magical Tool: Golden fleur-de-lis necklace
Real Name: Catherine Milane
Path: Obrimos
Order: Adamantine Arrow
Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 2, Resolve 3
Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2
Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 4, Composure 3
Mental Skills: Academics (Law) 3, Computer 1, Investigation 2, Occult 2, Politics 1
Physical Skills: Athletics* (Running) 2, Brawl 2, Drive 1, Firearms 1
Social Skills: Empathy 2, Intimidation* 2, Persuasion (Debate) 3, Socialize 2, Streetwise 2
Merits: Consilium Status 2, Fighting Style (Kung Fu) 2, High Speech, Library (Shared; Magical Tactics, Legendary Weapons, Lex Magica, Shadow Realm, Verges) 5, Order Status: Adamantine Arrow, Resources 2, Sanctum (Shared; Size 3, Security 1), Striking Looks 2
Willpower: 6
Wisdom: 7
Virtue: Justice
Vice: Sloth
Initiative: 6
Defense: 2
Speed: 10
Health: 7
Gnosis: 2
Arcana: Fate 1, Forces 2, Mind 1, Prime 2, Space 1
Rotes: *Fate* — Winds of Chance (•); *Forces* — Nightsight (•), Kinetic Blow (••), Unseen Shield (••); *Mind* — Sense Consciousness (•); *Prime* — Dispel Magic (•),Supernal Vision (•), Squaring the Circle (••); *Space* — Finder (•)
Mana/per turn: 11/2
Armor: 2 ("Unseen Shield," Forces ••)
Magic Shield: 2 (Prime ••)



THYRSUS
Path of Ecstasy

Fortis grabbed Tabitha around the waist and pulled her to him, out of the back seat of his Jetta and into his arms. She was cold. Limp.

"Don't worry, Abby," he said, hoisting her body away from the door and kicking it shut. "This guy's the best." He was in tall grass up to his knees, weeds and beer cans and plastic bags tangling around his sneakers. The lot was closed in on three sides by chain-link fences and, to one side, most of a brick wall. Rusted pipes jutted up like bamboo where once there had been a basement. Where there weren't weeds there was mud over rotted linoleum.

The center of the lot was marked by a pitted and flimsy RV, mid-size, scratched to hell. Outside of the cab, its windows were either plywood or plastic bags.

"They say he's the best, Abby." Fortis snorted in snot and scanned the lot, watching the shiny, invisible trails of Prime float off of hibernating spells like smoke off dropped cigarettes. He started towards the RV, watching his step and squeezing Tabitha to his chest. He cried out, "Hello?"

The RV rattled and the back door swung open on the casual slope of a leaning trucker. The guy looked like Santa Claus in flannel and denim. His face was creased with sleep, his eyes were hidden behind half-tinted bifocals. He didn't seem to have a mouth, just a swollen beard.

"Sir," Fortis said, "Granger said you could help me."

"Uh huh," the RV man said. "Why didn't Granger help you?"

"He said you're the best there—"

"Don't say that." The RV man spat in the weeds. "Bad luck."

Fortis waited. He was suddenly aware how still Tabitha was. "She dying," he finally said.

"I think she's done with that, son. But she han't gone too far, yet. Bring her in," the RV man leaned away, holding the door open. When Fortis was half up the aluminum steps into the RV, with Tabitha's face between him and Santa's, the RV man said, "Don't tell Granger I helped you."

Life has always taken place in a tumult without apparent cohesion, but it only finds its grandeur and its reality in ecstasy and in ecstatic love.
—Georges Bataille

Mages who make their journey to the Watchtower of the Stone Book in the Primal Wild are touched for the rest of their lives with insight into the living forces of the world, the Arcana of Life and Spirit. They are the keepers of wisdom from primordial times, the most basic truths of the spirit and the physical vessel the spirit animates. Thyrsus mages understand the mysteries of *Bios* and *Zoë*: both the fragility of an individual life and the incomparable tenacity of the life force itself. They witness the infinitely complex dance of spirits that underpins all life and natural phenomena, and they see the physical results of that ephemeral dance as they manifest in the world. Thyrsus mages see, with an unmatched clarity, the consequences of vices, and they habitually direct their lives toward the greatest sources of vitality. They sense and find themselves drawn toward health and well-being, but they also seek out the injured that the Thyrsus may heal them. Some find Thyrsus mages unpredictable or enigmatic. Shamans clearly value life, but they also value death — the deaths of those whose demise makes the herd stronger. Phrases such as "survival of the fittest" and "natural selection" haven't even been in use more than two centuries, but Shamans have seen those principles at work for millennia, and Thyrsus understand the powerful bond between life and spirit with a transcendent wisdom.

Though other Paths may have their strengths, Thyrsus mages see themselves as the sturdy roots supporting all other branches of magical knowledge. Theirs are the most fundamental secrets: those of life and the animating forces that make it worth living.

Theme

The Tarot card associated with the Thyrsus Path is the Moon, the card of unconscious bestial impulses, mystery — and piercing mystery with intuition. The Moon is a card of untamed forces or all sorts, whether wild beasts, explosive passions or madness. The Moon represents what is feral and untamed about ourselves, and the struggle we engage in to keep the mask of civility firmly in place.

The standard illustration on the Moon card shows the three-faced moon gazing down on the world (some decks may represent the moon anthropomorphized more specifically as Diana, the goddess of the hunt, or Hecate, the goddess of magic, both very apropos to the Thyrsus Path). In the foreground, a lobster, symbolizing the most primordial facets of life, crawls out of the tide while a wolf and a dog, wild and domesticated versions of the same beast, gaze at each other from opposite sides of a road. They might be in conflict, but they might just as easily be commiserating. In the background are two towers, representing the defenses humans have erected against the threats of the wild — or which might separate them from the very force that might save him.

In a reading, the Moon card advises a querant not to trust appearances (very good advice with dealing with the shapechanging mages traveling the Path of Ecstasy), but to seek answers through intuitive means or by plumbing the deep well of instinct. The Moon may represent hidden dangers (either external threats such as enemies or internal threats such as a burgeoning madness), and the card's basic conflict is that of order versus chaos or civilization versus savagery.

That last is the core conflict for most Thyrsus mages; the fight between civilization and savagery is a mirror image of the struggle fought every day by these mages who have every talent necessary for living alone, and often ample motivation as well, but who might stand to gain quite a bit from seeking out the company of other mages. The problem here is that many Thyrsus mages are quite happy to reside away from society, while most other members of Awakened society tend to prefer cities.

Thyrsus mages are sensitive to the pulse of the world's rhythms — the waxing and waning of the moon, the change of the seasons, the chirruping of crickets, the beating of hearts — and cities make such sensitivity difficult, if not impossible. What the wise Shaman recognizes as wisdom, the shallow urbanite may well interpret as eccentricity, if not outright madness.

Where there is life, however, Thyrsus mages can be found. Pristine forests and lush jungles inspire and invite these mages with a potent allure, but such places are fewer now and not so easy to find. Increasingly, Shamans bring their Arcana to bear on other sites where life and spirits play a part and where their ministrations can sooth spiritual wounds inflicted on the Realms Invisible. Thyrsus mages increasingly gather in the urban wilds where Nature fights to heal the wounds inflicted by humans. They bring their magic to bear even in the hearts of cities and the most blighted industrialized areas: city parks, forest preserves, abandoned factories bound by ropes of lush green kudzu and overgrown rail yards that need only a magical nudge from a mage to return completely to Nature. Their Awakened peers may see this Thyrsus obsession as madness, and it may be, but madness is a birthright and comfort to these mages.

The madness reflected in the Moon card is often attributed, fairly and otherwise, to mages on the Path of Ecstasy, as the isolation they prefer does often leave them a bit eccentric, or at least unaccustomed to social niceties. In part, this is due to their acute awareness of events in the Realms Invisible. The presence

of spirits has at least as much to do with the behavior of Thyrsus mages as the presence of other physical entities. Few other mages see or react to events in the Shadow Realm as regularly as those on the Thyrsus Path, and Shamans alone understand spirit behavior in light of their experiences in the Primal Wild.



Mood: Passionate

Thyrsus mages are a multifaceted lot, but if they had to be described by a single word, passionate would do nicely. Their emphasis on impulse, instinct and urge often gives them an inclination toward powerful emotions, and some of these mages are more capable of controlling their passions than others. Those who gain a modicum of control of their impulses can manage to be just as socially acceptable as any other mage, but those who isolate themselves grow unaccustomed to wearing the polite (or, as they see it, *fake*) mask of society and may find it difficult to interact with others. Such isolated mages are, unsurprisingly, blunt in their appraisals of others, not just with regard to criticism, but just as commonly in their appreciation of physical beauty and the like.

These mage's powerful passions can manifest in a myriad of ways. The most difficult Thyrsus to deal with are those with a violent streak that they can't always master in time. Other mages give these Shamans wide berth, as they may be reckless in their use of magic or just plain violent. Other Thyrsus mages who are prone to more libidinous passions can be troublesome in other ways. Such a mage might be the charming guy whose eyes constantly linger over the bodies of those he's attracted to. He's not doing it to be rude, and, if anything, he sees it as a form of flattery that the object of his desire should be flattered by. When two Thyrsus are attracted to one another, and they often are, it's often best just to get the sex out of the way as quickly as possible so as to keep the disruption of everything else around them to a minimum.

When something has a Thyrsus mage's attention, the mage's intensity is hard to match (or keep up with). Others find the Thyrsus' laser-like focus uncomfortable, and though it can be inconvenient under some circumstances, it also makes those on the Path of Ecstasy incredibly diligent in whatever task they have set for themselves. When a mage on the Path of Ecstasy invests herself in a task, she devotes herself to it wholeheartedly (some say obsessively). Similar to a shark or an eagle, a Thyrsus mage on the hunt (of whatever sort) is both awe-inspiring and terrifying. And, given the amoral bent of Thyrsus mages, both of these responses are appropriate.

Many Thyrsus mages find the first few months after Awakening to be very difficult, as they strive to bring the insights and passions they gained in the Primal Wild into line with whatever their moral code was before their Awakening. Such moral codes rarely survive the conflict.

In nature, there is neither right nor wrong; there are only consequences. Mages on the Path of Ecstasy understand this almost implicitly, and many of them quickly develop a reputation for amoral behavior not long after their Awakening. Morality is a often non-issue for them, and they quickly lose all hang-ups about any aspect of the natural world (although they find a lot of what takes place in the "civilized" world sickening). Sex is a form of passionate play for Thyrsus mages, and need not be tied up and twisted in an unnatural web of moralist strictures or expectations. (They're also very pragmatic about the consequences of sex, and they are quite adept at avoiding things such as sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy.)

Shamans can be just as amoral about killing. As the cat feels no remorse at the death of the mouse, so it is with Thyrsus mages and those they feel are below them — in theory. They don't kill for fun, but they don't shrink from it either. Death is the lot of the weak and the old, and there is no story older than that of predator killing prey. Life feeds on life. This is necessary. Their amorality is often kept in check only by simple pragmatism — and the echoes of old societal teachings and human guilt.

The solution that many Thyrsus mages arrive at — as a strategy for getting along with others if nothing else — is to hitch the horses of their passions to some noble goal to which they can devote themselves totally, such as the defense of a sacred Hallow or the death of a dangerous predator (animal or human). Once they do this, there's very little that can stand between them and their goals.

And one day, all Shamans know, they, too, will be prey instead of predator, a fact they strive to accept with equanimity. That understanding contributes to the passion with which Shamans lead their lives. Thyrsus mages are well aware that they're fair game in the food chain. A key truth held tightly in the Shamans' hearts is this: any predator, however fierce, will become prey when age or weakness overcomes him. And that, too, is a healthy part of the cycle they so revere. That's one reason Thyrsus mages keep themselves so fit, physically and magically: it staves off the day they shift from predator to prey.

History

By most human standards, the mages on the Path of Ecstasy are arguably the least social of the Atlantean mages, and some have wondered how mages on the Thyrsus Path have managed to transmit any of their history at all, being as isolated as they are.

But, in truth, it's only those who don't understand the Shaman's worldview who see them as idolated. Thyrsus mages don't see themselves as isolated at all. On the contrary, they see themselves as among the *most* social of mages if you accept, as they do, that they are intimately woven into a vast network of plants, animals, breezes and stones, all of whom Thyrsus mages can speak with. The tales Thyrsus mages obtain from powerful spirits are at least as reliable as anything committed to mere paper.

Even the most isolated Shaman, one who appears to live and die in total isolation, never having written a word, is likely known to spirits, and spirits talk among themselves — and to other mages. In a sense, some mages on the Path of Ecstasy feel as though they're living in a vast cosmic fishbowl with the eyes of the Universe (or Its representatives) watching constantly. Luckily for them, the Universe is not judgmental.

And so the history of the Thyrsus Path is quite well known, parts of it just tend to be a little . . . odd or vague, as spirits rarely see human events through the same lenses as humans themselves, and often don't quite manage to convey events as effectively as a human historian might.

Mythic History

A handful of Atlantean tablets and a number of old and powerful spirits recount a similar tale of the creation of the Watchtower of the Stone Book. All of these tales of the last days of Atlantis and the construction of the Watchtower in the Primal Wild — at least those that circulate among the mages on the Path of Ecstasy — agree on one fact. The Atlantean "king" who established the Watchtower of the Stone Book was, in fact, a queen.

Before the great battles in Atlantis began, this great queen could not be bothered to remain in the physical world for long. She was an archmaster and a frequent visitor to the highest spirit courts, and, by some definitions, a goddess in her own right. The Realms Invisible held much more allure to her than the material realm that she had grown beyond.

When she did spend time in the material realm, she was rarely in her palace in Atlantis. More often she was away, hunting. She prided herself on capturing and killing some of the last remaining Behemoths from the chaotic times when the world was born, and it was only on the hunt that she was truly happy.

In Atlantis, she wasn't well known, due to her many and frequent absences, although it was clear she was important, even among the Awakened. When she walked the streets of Atlantis, an honor guard of potent spirits led the way, many of them embodied in the forms of bird and bats, butterflies and dragonflies.

Legend maintains that this great queen was the last to erect a Watchtower, primarily because she could not bring herself to break off the fight that she so loved. As a masterful huntress and mage of unfathomable power, this queen took a feral delight in stalking the Exarchs. Such was her joy that she was slow to notice that the other kings had given up the battle in order to preserve the link between the Supernal and Fallen Worlds.

Having to let the Exarchs go enraged her, and she would not do it. According to the most common version of the story, a delegation of powerful spirits and a retinue of mortal thralls caught up to her between offensives on the Exarchs and explained to her what the fate of the Fallen World would be without some connection to the Supernal World.

While she was sympathetic, she did not have much of the martyr about her. She had no intention of giving up this most challenging of prey just to cloister herself away alone, in the name of defending a world she had largely abandoned anyway.

The delegation of spirits asked her a second time, more urgently, explaining that the spirits themselves in the Fallen World would begin fading away if there was no magic, that passion would fade away, and that, without the passion and inspiration sparked by the Supernal World, the Fallen World would fade like a guttering candle.

And the haughty and bestial queen still refused. *She* would never want for passion.

Dismayed and disappointed, the spirits were going to leave this savage queen to her hunt. The delegation was about to set off in hopes of finding some other mage-king, when a mortal attendant to these spirits, a dark-eyed young man, spoke up, against all the laws of spirit etiquette. This young man had no rank and no magical training (or talent) whatsoever, but he was beautiful to gaze upon. He had a radiant spirit, beautiful eyes and a singularly well-formed body.

"Will you do this thing for me?" he asked.

"I don't know you," said the queen.

"But you *want* me," said the young man. He knew he was right because he had long ago been cursed by a god of lust so that everyone, man or woman, spirit or beast, who saw him, *wanted* him.

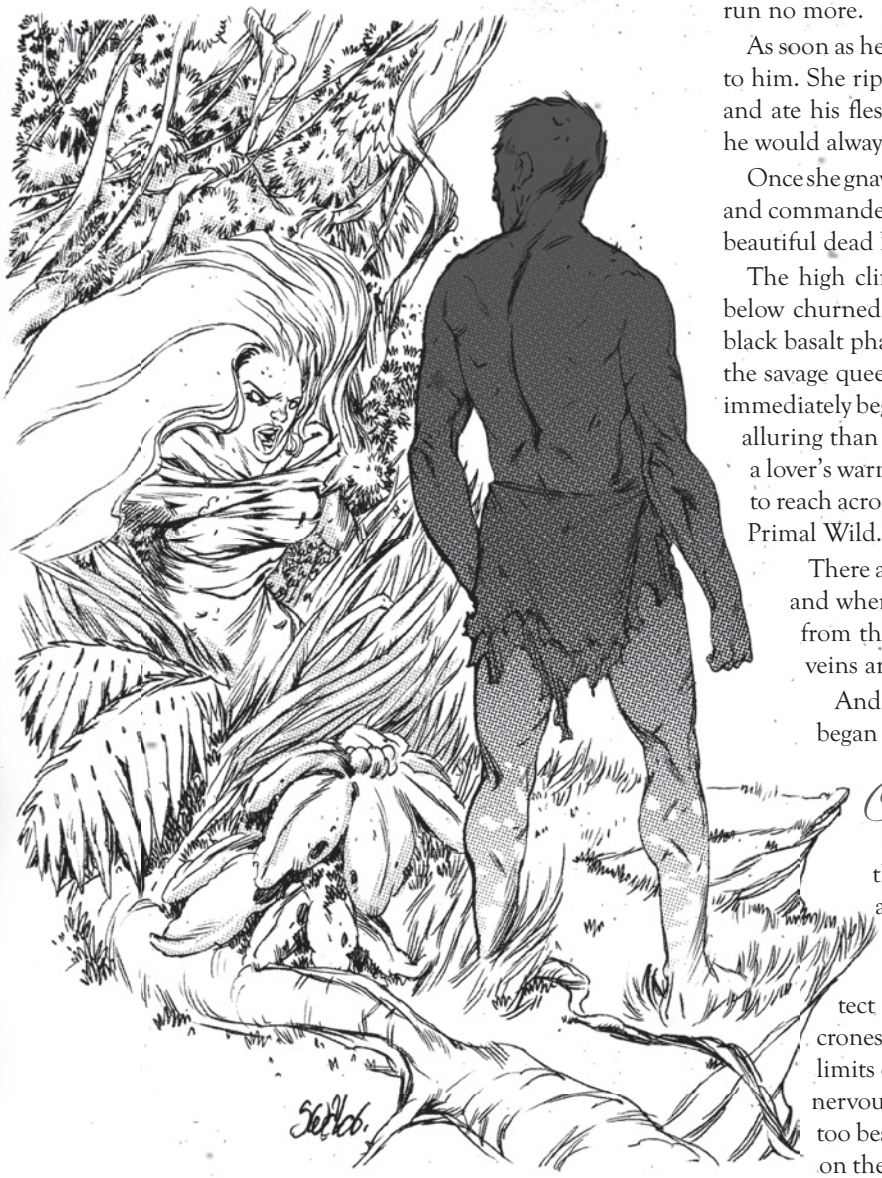
And she did.

"If you will break off this hunt for the Exarch," he said, "and establish a Watchtower, I will give myself to you."

The savage queen paused, growing moist in anticipation of her reward. "And who among you spirits will join us in this Realm?"

Knowing the alternative, all of them — beast spirits and storm spirits and all manner of small gods — agreed to join her in the Supernal Realm she forged.

And so she broke off her stalking of the Exarch. Doing so enraged her, as she was almost upon him.



With mighty magic almost beyond imagining, the savage queen formed the Primal Wild from her own vibrant soul, a place where the hunt would be eternal.

When her young lover came to her, aroused and urgent in his lust, their passion was a thing of legend. They rutted on beds of leaves, in the warm surf, tangled in the roots of trees. For days they slammed their bodies together, until the young man was spent and no longer seemed so young and desirable.

The savage queen looked at him, a smile on her lips, and she said, "Run."

And, seeing the look in her eyes, he ran.

Through the thorns and the brambles and the vines that clawed at him, he ran — until he emerged from the jungle, on a high cliff overlooking the rocks and surf below, and could run no more.

As soon as he stopped running, the savage queen caught up to him. She ripped his beautiful, spent body limb from limb and ate his flesh while it still twitched. This way, she knew, he would always be a part of her.

Once she gnawed his bones clean, she gathered them together and commanded the spirits to erect a tower in memory of her beautiful dead lover on that spot.

The high cliff trembled and moaned. The violent ocean below churned the brine into a salty white foam. A raging, black basalt phallus shot up from the soft mat of grass where the savage queen had arranged her young lover's bones, and immediately began pulsing with a primal yearning, a call more alluring than the cry of wounded prey, more enticing than a lover's warm promise. The tower's call was strong enough to reach across even the yawning Abyss, to call mages to the Primal Wild.

There at the base of the tower, the savage queen wept, and where her tears fell, great thorny vines pushed up from the rich, blood-drenched soil and wrapped like veins around the Watchtower.

And when her sobs had subsided, she stood and began looking for new prey.

Contemporary History

Shamans have had, throughout their history, the most ironic of places in their cultures. They are revered but reviled, beloved but banished and alternately honored and mocked.

Thyrsus are the healers and exorcists who protect the people from harm, but they are the mad crones, the exiled witchdoctors who lie just outside the limits of acceptable behavior. Shamans make people nervous, even as they help them. There's something too bestial, too rough, too otherworldly about mages on the Path of Ecstasy, so even though they have the

secrets and skills that can heal the body and soul, they are often prevented from doing so by the very people they might help.

No linear history captures the lot of Thyrsus mages, but there are themes that emerge.

Rainmakers

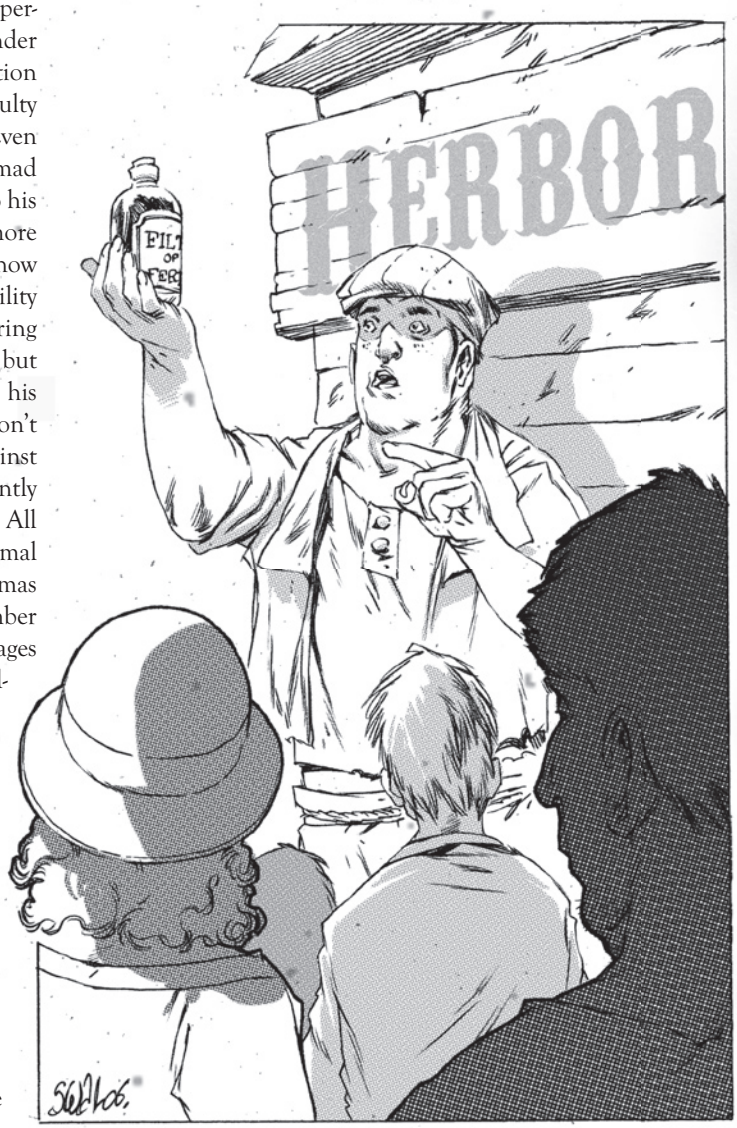
Throughout history, those on the Path of Ecstasy have had the ability to take care of their people better than many others, both in their capacity as healers and in their de facto role as ambassadors to the spirit courts. Sadly, this is often insufficient to protect the mage from the repercussions of her growing eccentricity.

The relationship between Thyrsus mages and their people have traditionally been strained, quite often to the extent that the mage simply leaves (or his people turn on him). It's difficult for a mage to pay attention to both the material and Shadow Realms at the same time. Depending on the local religion, superstitions and general temperament, speaking with spirits under any but the most secretive circumstances can be an invitation to execution or banishment. And that's not the only difficulty involved in leading lives on both sides of the Gauntlet. Even making the attempt frequently results in the mage going mad (or at least appearing to do so), which never endears him to his people — although it does often result in the mage being more capable of assisting his village in ways they won't and can't know about. What often happens is the mage will utilize his ability to speak with spirits to help his village — to bring rain during dry seasons or ask spirits to strengthen crops or children — but his communing with spirits brings him into conflict with his village, and so his village begins making it clear that they don't appreciate his odd behavior. And even as the village turns against him, the mage's ability to survive on his own grows significantly — as does his ability to help his village if he is so inclined. All of a sudden, the mage need not worry about wounds or animal venom or broken bones, or the other seemingly minor traumas that can result in death for a solitary wanderer. The number of villages and regions that have banished their Thyrsus mages under circumstances similar to this is beyond counting. If village members are wise, they will note that life grows notably more difficult after the departure of the mage, apologize and ask her to return. Unfortunately, what happens with nearly the same frequency is that the village members notice things growing worse again and blames the mage they banished for cursing them. On occasion, she does curse them, making the plummet all the more painful and obvious for those who did not appreciate her.

Lives of Sea and Storm

The ultimate manifestation of this alienation was the Shamans' flight to the sea. Further reinforcing the Thyrsus connection to the element of water, many on this Path have historically been drawn to the mariner's life. Many were curious about the wild spirits of sea and storm that lived out beyond the borders controlled by humankind; combined with the antisocial tendencies of many Thyrsus mages and the fact that relatively simple magic can convey the ability to breathe water (thereby negating one of the greatest dangers of the nautical life), the life of a sailor has appealed to Shamans since the advent of seafaring. While their magic didn't make them better sailors, per se, it gave them a great ability to withstand the rigors of ocean travel.

At times, there might be a whole handful of mages on a single ship. There are legends of ships whose entire crews were made up of mages on the Path of Ecstasy, although these ships are exceptionally rare. When such mages chose the pirate's life, they could easily instruct spirits of wind and tide to make their targets sitting ducks. In shallow water, Thyrsus mages might dispense with boarding altogether and ask storm spirits sink the vessel, allowing them to dive down after it later at their leisure.



Their shipboard presence made it easy for mages to get to those places they've often thought of as their ideal sanctums: islands. Ships took mages to the Azores, the Caribbean, to Polynesia, and to a myriad of lesser-known islands, where Shamans could be alone with their spirits and their spells.

Modern Alienation

The modern era has done nothing to help Thyrsus mages fit in. If anything, the steady advance of industry and the retreat of the natural world has made the plight of Thyrsus mages worse. Once a mage tastes the raw freedom, the heady exhilaration of unfettered Nature, the charms of the artificial world seem faded and dull, even as they become more prevalent.

Thesis

Below is the description of the Realm to which the Thyrsus Path leads: the vast, teeming Realm of the Primal Wild. This section covers the Realm itself as well as the Watchtower, and the ways in which echoes of the Primal Wild make their way even into the consciousness of Sleepers.

The Primal Wild

The Primal Wild is the origin of the Life and Spirit Arcana. This is a Realm of unmitigated vitality and appetites, a place where spirit and matter are indistinguishable, and where the natural cycles spin faster, stronger and more powerfully than anything known in the Fallen World.

The Jungle

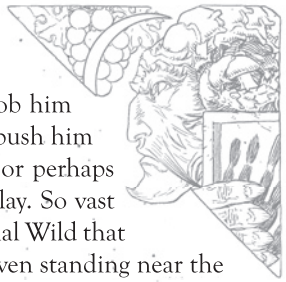
All ecological systems have their mirror in the Primal Wild, but none of them is so vast and terrible as the jungle, and out of the jungle the Watchtower of the Stone Book rises. Even in the Fallen World, the jungle is used as a metaphor for places of unrestrained predation, but nothing in the jungles of the Fallen World compares to the Primal Wild. Here, the ferocity of the struggles is more savage, the appetites of the predators are bigger and more urgent and the dread of the prey animals almost unfathomable.

Everything in the jungles of the Primal Wild wants its share of flesh and blood, including the trees and vines — and everything has strategies for getting it.

Mages report that they felt impulsive, terrified and vaguely feverish while making their visit to the Primal Wild — and also more exhilarated and aroused, in all ways, than they'd ever felt in their lives. Remaining rational amidst the terrors and strange freedom of the jungle is nigh impossible.

The Ocean

There is a disturbing sensation that many people experience when going swimming for the first time in a large natural body of water — a feeling of dread, of insignificance or helplessness. Indifferent to the swimmer, waves bob him up and down or splash over him, or push him under with complete indifference — or perhaps with the amoral delight of a cat at play. So vast and powerful is the ocean in the Primal Wild that most feel that sense of helplessness even standing near the beach.



No other ocean feels so *oceanic*, so vast, so unpredictable and merciless as this one. The allure of the moon is stronger and so, consequently, are the tides. The crash of surf on shore is more akin to titans in battle than anything else, and as every phenomenon here is self-aware, that's precisely what it is. Out on the open oceans, storm gods fight and play, using maelstroms and waterspouts and whole hurricanes as toys.

Predators

No other Supernal Realm is as well guarded as the Primal Wild. This isn't because there are particularly powerful entities assigned the role of "guardians," but rather because any creature or spirit (there's no difference between the two here) entering the Primal Wild is welcomed enthusiastically into the food chain. The Primal Wild is a Rank 10 entity in its own right, whose creatures are cells in its greater whole, whose myriad ecosystems fulfill the role of organs — and the Primal Wild does not like unauthorized visitors. Accordingly, the hyper-predators of the Primal Wild have a particular talent for catching the scent of entities from beyond this Supernal Realm, and they converge on such creatures en masse, intent on drawing first blood or striking the killing blow. This same pattern plays out in all parts of the Primal Wild, with the enormous sharks and squid of the ocean, the terrible devil tigers, dire wolves and monster bears of the land, the swarming raptors of the skies and everywhere unfathomably virulent and lethal pathogens that make Ebola virus seem like a head cold in comparison.

Once an intruder succumbs, and any predators that fell in combat with it, the intruder is reclaimed by the Primal Wild, where even the remains of the most tainted acamoth are purified and reclaimed into the natural cycle by sacred mushrooms (and other saprophytes, such as puffballs and slime molds) capable of neutralizing any corruption.

Providing an extra degree of security, as though the Primal Wild needed it, is the fact that the Primal Wild is the home of many powerful and very active spirits of all ranks, up to the very highest, who do not appreciate the interference of the Abyss (or, truth be told, other Supernal Realms, either).

The Watchtower

The Watchtower of the Stone Book is an enormous, craggy pinnacle of black basalt jutting toward the sky from an already high cliff overlooking the violent ocean. Some describe the Watchtower as looking like an enormous forearm with a lithic



fist (or claw) clenched at the top; others claim the Watchtower resembles a vast stone phallus. Like an abandoned lighthouse, the tower watches over the stormy sea on one side and the top of the jungle canopy on the other. Thorny vines entwine the Watchtower like cruel bindings, and those who want to make their way to the cave on top to forge their connection to the Realm must climb these vines, paying a tithe of blood to the thorns in so doing.

Inside the cavern at the top, one sees the Stone Book itself: seemingly infinite cave paintings representing all the creatures of the world. The cave is nowhere near big enough, rationally, to fit pictures of every creature, and yet the cave is so.

The Awakening mage signs her name with fluid from her own body. Blood is so easy to come by after climbing the thorny vines as to be almost trite. Over the centuries, mages have found that tears and sweat work just as well as blood, and that semen and menstrual blood, fluids associated with the generative abilities, leave especially bright signatures.

Laws of the Wild

As one mage wrote after his Awakening: "The Primal Wild has stepped into the foreground, the depths of reality have been opened, the elemental forms of everything that is creative, everything that is destructive, have arisen, bringing with them infinite rapture and infinite terror." Any follower of the Path of Ecstasy knows well that profound sensation experienced in the Primal Wilds, and the memory of their Awakening fills them with terror as much as exhilaration and pride.

There's no place in the Fallen World that could prepare a person for the Primal Wild. It is simultaneously the most beautiful and most terrifying place imaginable. The lushest jungle on Earth feels barren and stunted in comparison. The Primal Wild is nature amplified almost to unrecognizable degrees. Every creature in the Fallen World, and then some, can be found in the Primal Wild, and no division exists between creatures or objects and their spirits. Life of all sorts teems in its woods, waters and vast savannahs. The density and lushness of every one of its climes is far greater than anything seen in Earth. There is both more variety and activity in species. For every subspecies an animal has on Earth, the animal has a hundred or more in this place, some so different as to be unrecognizable. Predators are hungrier and more dangerous. Prey animals are faster and more numerous. Trees are bigger, some rising over a mile over the forest floor. Storms are larger and violent beyond comprehension. The oceans are infinite.

Vitality of all sorts is amplified in the Primal Wild. Plants and animals both regenerate at a phenomenal pace. Minor wounds close up within moments. Bones set and heal overnight. A beast that loses a leg to a predator will likely grow the limb back within a week (if the beast lives that long). Predators can chase prey at a full sprint at speeds we might find more akin to that of fast cars or slow planes, and the predators do so for days and nights on end, across hundreds of miles, before tiring.

Though this is the focal point of the Life Arcanum, there is death, and lots of it. The savage tango between predators and prey is hotter and more violent. Life and death are complements, not antitheses. Death is pure and healthy here, a tool that hones species, not the slowly plodding thing death has become in the Fallen World. When a creature does die here — at the claws of a predator, or from a disease virulent enough to fell entire Earthly nations — the creature's remains are gone within a matter of hours as its corpse provides sustenance for the living. Even the very largest carcasses, some the size of football fields, are stripped of their meat within the space of a day, with enormous saprophytes like table-sized mushrooms being the last link in the chain.

Emotions, too, are amplified, and rationality feels stunted or superfluous. Nervousness escalates into terror and panic in mere moments. Vague interest and mild attraction blossom into full erotic passion, even to others one wouldn't typically be attracted to (close friends or members of the same sex, for example). Annoyance explodes in violent rage in a similar span of time.

Everything here is one with its spirit, which accounts for some of the immense vitality of the entities here. To a visitor

from the Fallen world, everything here seems itself amplified by orders of magnitude. Stones are harder and stonier. Water is wetter. Fire is hotter and burns more brightly. When the sun shines, its heat and cleansing power seems both terrible and glorious far beyond what they might seem in the Fallen World. The sun is not just a ball of gasses undergoing nuclear fusion, He is a Rank 10 god of unfathomable majesty and power. The moon, likewise, is a cold and cunning mistress of deception, dressed perpetually in white and silver, who uses cunning and guile to get what She wants. Here all things are the gods of themselves. The ocean is Ocean, the forest is Forest and all mountains are Mountain, as they have ever been, as they unquestionably are, and as they ever will be.

The Inferior Arcanum: Mind

The Primal Wild is a place of impetus, passion and drive. It is the ultimate domain of impulse, instinct and intuition. The behavior of a thing (and "thing," though vague, is the best word in this case, as the distinction between an entity and an object is vague here if, indeed, there is one at all) is determined by its spirit, nature and appetites. The residents of this place act in accordance with their natures, the drives they feel at their core, not on the dictates of something so flimsy as thought or even consciousness. All the passions — rage, passion, terror — are inflamed here, and eclipse rational thought. Decisions here are made by hormones, pheromones and blood chemistry, not enlightened rationality. Even the notion of "stopping to think" is a non-existent concept here, a null set, and anything that tried to do so would likely die.

Neither thought nor rationality (not even the questionable rationality of dreams) has any part to play in this place. Things *are*. They *act*. They *do*. Animals feed, fuck and die; there is no holding back to contemplate, everything happens too fast for that. The extra layer of thought, symbol, expectation or meaning that is familiar to those in the material world is peeled back in this place, leaving the denizens of the Primal Wilds naked of any of the glamour or artifice that might be more familiar in Arcadia. Thought, dreams and judgment are foreign concepts to this place. Things are because they are. They hunt because they are hungry or they flee because they fear death, or they fuck because it feels good.

The Primal Wild is a simple place, free of deception, shame or hope. This is not to imply that the Primal Wild is a place of stupidity or ignorance, but its denizens understand their world through intuition, rather than thought and rely more on cunning than on intellect.

The ecstatic state sought out by many Thyrsus mages is a means of transcending or bypassing thought. These mages tune their minds to the primordial and unsullied "frequency" of the Primal Wilds, and thereby render themselves immune to judgment, illusions or other weaknesses to which conscious thought is prone.

Correspondences

The Thyrsus Path is rich with connotation, some of which are so resonant that they have leaked out to Sleeper society. The symbols of this Path are ancient and potent, and those walking the Path hold onto them with particular zeal.

The weapon of choice is the staff, specifically the Thyrsus, the ivy-wreathed, pinecone-tipped staff carried by the maenads. In the ancient world, ivy was considered the symbol of immortality and associated with the god Dionysus. The pinecone at its tip is both the staff's glans and the storage chamber for seeds that could grow a new tree. The staff comes from the wood of a tree, and holds within itself the strength of the tree that formed it, and, under the right circumstances (especially magical circumstances), a staff might take root and create a new tree. In scaled-down form, the staff becomes the wand, the traditional magical tool used to focus the caster's will. Some Thyrsus mages continue to use wands, and they vary wands according to the Arcana used in the spell they're casting.

The proper attire for one on this Path is fur, specifically the fur of something the mage hunted and killed himself. In the modern world, some mages have relaxed their definitions a bit and wear leather instead.

Thyrsus mages have a strong affinity for the element of water. Water, particularly seawater, is strongly linked to bodily fluids, particularly blood. Without water, there can be no life. Life first formed in nutrient-rich seawater; before life could evolve out of the oceans, blood had to take over the function of the nutrient medium, delivering oxygen and nutrients to the cells. Water is also the element of sex and sexuality, of birth and of nurturing, spheres of influence of which Thyrsus mages are masters.

Blood is crucial to Thyrsus mages in other capacities as well. The color of blood is the color of the Thyrsus Path. Whether the bright scarlet of fresh arterial blood or the rusty brown of old blood stains, all of these resonate well with Thyrsus philosophy and magic.

Spiritually, water elementals are far more active and varied than most other spirits: rivers, lakes, oceans, steam, sweat, mist, clouds, rain, snow, ice and frost all have their own spirits, and Shamans are familiar with most, if not all, of these. Nautical Shamans have a long history of dealing with these presences, and some of the oldest pacts between Thyrsus mages and spirits are with them.

The gem that Thyrsus mages connect with most closely is the sapphire, a gem that the Greeks believed opened the "third eye" and allowed mortals to see the spirits at work around them. Shamans still use sapphires in their Spirit spells (when they can afford them), and sapphires are included in fetishes as often as a mage can manage it.

Optional Rule: At the Storyteller's discretion, a mage can buy additional dice in the creation of a Fetish by incorporat-

ing sapphires. The mage gains (Resources cost – 1) additional dice on rolls to bind a spirit into a fetish incorporating these gems. Note: Thyrsus are not ostentatious mages. A fetish can incorporate sapphires without using them obviously: held in a leather pouch, bound into a coconut shell or similar designs.

Plants, too, are sacred to Shamans, some plants more than others. More than any plant, the vine is considered representative of the Thyrsus Path. Many mages on the Path of Ecstasy recall with reverend, if painful, clarity the vines they had to climb during their Awakening to get to the cave of the Stone Book. The ability of vines to climb and insinuate themselves into new and higher places makes them ideal for this Path. Vines tend to be hardy plants, tough and difficult to control, similar to the mages the vines often represent. Though vines in general are associated with the Thyrsus Path, certain vines are more closely linked than others. Most obviously is the grape vine, the plant most connected to Dionysus. From the grapes of the vine come wine, the best known of the gifts of this deity. After grape vines come ivy, the plant held to be symbolic of immortality, a trait many Thyrsus find intriguing, if not an entirely accurate correspondence. In Asia, and in the American South, the vine that best represents the Thyrsus Path is kudzu, the incredibly fast-growing vine that can take over whole fields, overrun tall trees and even tear down telephone poles during the course of a single summer. Kudzu vines can grow several inches in a day, and in places where kudzu is growing, legend has it that windows must be closed at night to keep the vines out of the house. Kudzu embodies vegetal tenacity and the ability of Nature to reclaim what has been taken from Her by the artifice of humanity.

Mages Awakening on the Thyrsus Path are known to be difficult at times. Their relatively low impulse control, obsessiveness, independent streak and antisocial tendencies make them very similar to the animal they're most closely associated with: cats of all sorts. Some of this harkens back, again, to the Dionysus myth. Panthers were sacred to Dionysus, and they were sometimes sacrificed at his biennial festivals. Cats also embody the amoral tendencies of those on the Path of Ecstasy better than almost any other animal.

The mythological creature that best represents mages on the Path of Ecstasy is the minotaur: the powerful fusion of human and animal, possessed of the cunning necessary to master the labyrinth combined with the raw physical might of the bull. Another amalgam of animal and human, the satyr, is also revered by Thyrsus mages, although to a lesser degree than the fearsome minotaur.

The scent of musk, in both its fragrant and not so fragrant manifestations, is often used by Shamans as it has primal connotations shared by no other scent. Musk is animalistic and savage, but can be alluring and intensely sexual. Musk is often used in spells that help the mage change shape. If musk is necessary for a spell, Thyrsus mages have been known to either hunt the animal whose musk they want (usually the civet or otter) and just take the musk gland. In more recent years, both species have grown less common, and mages have harvested the substance from the creatures using magic, then releasing the creature back into the wild.

The mode of transport that many Thyrsus mages claim as their own is the mule: this animal is decidedly *not* glamorous, and often quite stubborn, but it is hardy, strong, sturdy and capable of going places that other mounts cannot. The mule is also the animal ridden by Dionysus and is associated with viticulture, as the Greeks used the mule in harvesting grapes from the vine.

The Heavenly body that corresponds to the Path of Ecstasy is the moon. These mutable mages have a powerful role model (and some would say benefactress) in the ever-changing moon. If the primary struggle in the life of a Thyrsus mage is that against madness, or lunacy, then it's no wonder, since the moon has long been believed to control madness.

The moon is also associated with predators and spirits, both of which have particular significance to the mages of this Path. Legend has it that the moon has a powerful effect on shape shifters, and the protean mages of the Thyrsus Path are no exception.

Wine is the food associated with the Path of Ecstasy. First and foremost, wine is symbolic of rebirth: the process of fermentation takes the juice of the grape and gives it new life as wine. The first known fermented beverage was not wine, specifically, but mead, the result of honey that had been watered down and fermented. Honey, itself considered sacred, was seen as a gift of the gods, through their agents, the bees. Honey represents life acting upon life to create something that both nourishes and brings ecstasy.

The other factor that makes wine key to those on the Path of Ecstasy is wine's ability to induce drunkenness or frenzy. Thyrsus mages sometimes prophesy while in the depths of an ecstatic trances. Time is not an Arcanum with which Shamans are felt to have any strong connection, but they can often prophesy along with the best of them, if only because they can see the spirits of nature preparing for large phenomena before they actually unfold in the material realm. Some Thyrsus have described this as hanging out backstage, behind reality's curtains, and seeing what's to come in the next act.

Dionysus is, at his most debased, considered a god of wine and drunkenness, but he is far more than that. He is the god of the vine that gives grapes, the god of the bees that create the honey from which mead is brewed and the god of indestructible life.

Glimpses of a Higher World

The powerful yearning and resonance of the Watchtower of the Stone Book is far too strong to hide from Sleepers. They

may not understand its origin or its function, but the Watchtower informs the sensibilities of Sleepers across the planet. Unfortunately, many find themselves terrified of their own natures, of the spirit world and of everything the Primal Wild embodies. Perhaps Sleepers identify more with prey animals then predators, perhaps Sleepers have just grown too fond of the comforting illusion of civilization, but many Sleepers are deeply, viscerally horrified by any reminder of humanity's animalist nature, and Sleepers vilify anything that brings it to mind or challenges their almost pathological denial of the fact. Some find any hint of aggression disturbing and pretend that the world they live in is somehow safe. Others would have all mention of sexuality purged from the world, despite the fact that no other drive compares in intensity to Eros.

Consequently, those gods who best personify the power and values of the Primal Wild are often mistaken for devils (as Shamans themselves have been in the past) — which they are not — or portrayed as dangerous, threatening and amoral — which they unquestionably are.

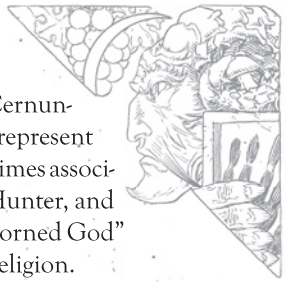
Dionysus/Bacchus: By far the most common symbols of the Thyrsus Path visible to Sleepers come from the myths of Dionysus. A god of life, of madness, of wine, of ecstasy and transformation, Dionysus is seen, at his most debased, as Bacchus, a mere god of drunkenness after whom the Bacchanalia was named. The great god Dionysus is *much* more than that. Life itself, in all its savagery and power, is the purview of this god. Those who would tap into the power of Nature must come face to face with Dionysus, alternately called "the mad god," "the roarer," "the eater of raw flesh" and "the render of men."

The followers of Dionysus were largely women, though some men in women's garb also followed him. These followers were called *maenads*, meaning the frenzied ones. Their religious rites were events of tremendous savagery and eroticism, much as gatherings of Thyrsus mages are even today.

Pan: The goat-legged Pan is a god of Nature in all its terrifying, predatory, lusty power. The power of Nature to cause terror in mortals is reflected in the word panic, which comes from this god's name. When the young Christian religion needed to give form to its Devil, Christians chose the image of the horned and goat-legged Pan, because they could think of nothing more terrifying (and because they had to come up with an image more frightening than the religion's own omnipotent, schizophrenic and judgmental deity).

Diana: A huntress connected to the moon, Diana is associated with the Thyrsus Path in its more human or civilized aspects. She helps tame the wild more than she embodies it, but the symbol of the huntress resonates powerfully with mages on this Path.

Gaia: A Titan of the Earth, Gaia's body *is* the natural world. Thyrsus mages who follow the Wiccan religion often worship Nature through its manifestation as Gaia.



Cernunnos: A Celtic horned god, Cernunnos is a mysterious figure believed to represent animal fecundity. Cernunnos is sometimes associated with another figure, Herne the Hunter, and the two are often referred to as "the Horned God" by modern followers of the Wiccan religion.

Shiva: An ascetic god of passion and primordialism, Shiva is the dancing god whose steps and gestures represent the cycles of birth and death, primordial creation and destruction. Shiva is a god of animals and wild places, and he is often represented as carrying cobras in his hands and wearing a headdress of the triple moon.

The Green Man: The Green Man is a common icon of Nature from medieval Europe. His face is made of leaves, and he is often seen with a stream of leaves pouring from his mouth. The Green Man is the spirit of the forest, the god of the primeval woods and a manifestation of the vegetal power of the Primal Wild.

Praxis

This section describes how the mages of the Thyrsus Path come across to others, how Shamans strike others interpersonally — their appearance and attitudes — and Shamans' nimbuses as well.

Appearance

The body is the temple of all Thyrsus mages. They know exactly what's necessary to keep their bodies in peak condition. They never suffer from that little extra paunch, or minor allergies, or warts or acne. Their skin is clear and taut; their eyes are bright and their muscles are firm beneath their skin. Youth and health linger in Thyrsus mages late into life. These mages don't stop ageing, but they never *look* old. They could be over 100 and still appear to be no older than a vigorous 60 years old.

With their state of health being consistently high, the only factor that varies much is their wardrobe and degree of hygiene. Some Thyrsus are known for wearing the same, or nearly the same, outfit every day. Others bathe once a week whether they need it or not. Younger mages, those with high Wisdom scores and those who have never made a complete break from human society, can be just as fashion conscious as any other mage, albeit with an eye toward durability and functionality in the clothing they wear. Others see fashion as nothing more than artifice, a false front invented by Sleepers to hide the symptoms of the poor way they treat their bodies.

Thyrsus mages choose their clothes for durability and comfort over appearance. The less astute among their number might wear plaid and stripes in the same outfit, but whatever they're wearing will be comfortable, sturdy and appropriate for the weather. Shamans prefer natural fibers — wool, cotton, leather and silk — for their clothes, eschewing artificial textiles as much as possible.

As Wisdom Falls

Some Thyrsus mages seem more resistant to losing Wisdom than others, but over time some still fall prey to hubris. The ability to change one's own physical body is a powerfully liberating talent, and commanding the very spirits is also intoxicating to the ego. Both of these skills can lead a mage to a loss of Wisdom.

A Shaman with low Wisdom is more bestial than one with higher Wisdom. Wisdom, after all, separates humanity from the animals, which are driven solely by impulse and instinct. A Thyrsus mage with very low Wisdom is likely to forget to bathe, speaks in grunts and lose sight of the importance of social contacts outside the Realms Invisible. The guy in the news because he has 42 cats in one house, or who lives like an animal in the depths of a national park, could easily be a Thyrsus mage whose Wisdom has slipped a little too far.

Attitudes

Shamans are most accurately described as "earthy." They're very no-nonsense. They have the clearest understanding of the physical realities of the human condition of any of the Awakened. Nothing about the function of a healthy body bothers the Thyrsus in the least. They don't have shame or concern about any of the body's functions. They don't giggle and smirk about them; they aren't shy. At times, Sleepers and other mages alike can find the Thyrsus attitudes a bit *too* comfortable.

Concerning issues in the human-made world, Thyrsus mages are noncommittal and vaguely bored. They don't prefer one television show over another. They don't know what rock star is popular. They can't tell you this week's sports scores. The moment they sign their names in the Stone Book, such superfluous issues just fade away for these mages.

Those topics they *are* interested in, though — the protection of the natural world, balance in the spirit realm, scoring with the object of their affection — they're passionate about. These mages seem to have an inexhaustible supply of energy for those things that interest them, but none for subjects that they find tedious. In that way, they are very like the donkey, an animal associated with this Path.

Shamans often get a reputation for being easy and having a bawdy (or occasionally morbid) sense of humor. They're fine with that. Puritanical strictures on the body are, in their eyes, pointless and unhealthy. It's not that they go out of their way to talk about sex, it's just that they don't go out of their way *not* to talk about it, especially if that happens to be what's on their mind — and sex frequently is.

Nimbus

The vibrant, exhilarated sense that onlookers feel in the presence of Thyrsus magic (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 106) may be the most common nimbus of these mages, but it's hardly the only one. Following are a number of other nimbus effects that might be felt by those near the mage when he's performing potent magic.

Hungry Like the Wolf: Onlookers suddenly find themselves ravenous, overcome by powerful cravings for very, very rare steak, or possibly sushi. This craving will last until the person eats or goes to sleep.

Arousal: Those watching the mage cast his magic find themselves exceptionally, inexplicably sexually aroused. For the duration of the casting, the onlooker experiences all the symptoms of powerful sexual arousal, possibly to the point of spontaneous orgasm. This is a relatively common nimbus for those near a mage using shapeshifting magic.

Bestial Witness: Animals may converge on the place of the casting. Dozens or even hundreds of birds might land on every available perch, rats might pour up from the sewers, their beady black eyes intent on the mage, or pets might break loose from their owners to come be in the presence of the Shaman's magic. Harmful magic might elicit more disturbing animals: a cloud of locusts or flies might enshroud the caster, or a knot of serpents might entwine her feet and legs.

Strange Scents: Strange scents waft from the mage or her target. These fragrances might be musky (such as a wet animal), spicy (such as ginger or nutmeg) or florally sweet (such as lavender, roses or gardenia). Healing magic often triggers this nimbus. Using Life magic to harm a target typically results in foul odors instead: rotting milk, decaying flesh or asafetida.

Predator's Song: Those near the mage might hear (or imagine that they hear) the sound of some triumphant beast after a hunt: the roar of a lion, the mad shrieking of a chimpanzee, a howling wolf or some similar noise.

Unveiling: For a brief moment in the presence of powerful magic, the mage's nimbus might momentarily allow onlookers to see a flicker of the same animalist world the Shaman sees. Sleepers might sense waves of emotion coming from objects or natural phenomena — eagerness from a sports car, stability from a chair, anger from a fire and so on.

Hair Growth: Not only does the mage's nimbus cause viewers' hair to stand on end, the nimbus causes the hair to grow. A clean-shaven man might suddenly have three days of stubble on his face, while a bald individual might find himself growing hair again.

Human Claws: Those affected by the mage's nimbus might find their fingernails and toenails growing by as much as a half inch in the case of powerful magic. The nails are thicker and courser than usual and seem sharper. The nails can be clipped (with difficulty), but the thickened portion will stay thick until the affected portion grows out.

Muscle Tremors: An onlooker might develop a pronounced facial tic or experience a surge of involuntary muscle tremors rippling through her body. This won't cause the person to fall down, but might cause her to stagger or drop something held in her hands.

Bestial Impulsivity: Sleepers near the mage might experience an overwhelming instinctual impulse, a purely random amplification of some normally innocuous urge: a momentary irritation drives the person to punch the object of his irritation or a mild attraction causes the Sleeper to sexually grope the person he's attracted to. A vague sense of nervousness or disease, on the other hand, might trigger a full blown panic attack and cause a person to bolt like a rabbit fleeing a pack of hounds.

Sanctums

Much of the Thyrsus reputation for reclusiveness stems from the fact that they like to cultivate a strong bond with the spirits of the wild, with whom they often feel a connection after their journey to the Primal Wild. Certainly, they *can* make connections with spirits of a more urban nature, but there's just not much precedent for doing so. While there are *millennia* worth of stories, lore, agreements, pacts and etiquette built up around dealings with nature spirits, there are, at most, a few centuries of the same kind of information dealing with the strange artificial spirits of the modern age.

Accordingly, Shamans choose sanctums that give them at least some degree of access to nature. Shamans, when left to their own devices, prefer places where human encroachment has not displaced or changed the spirits of the land, the water and the air. This typically means very rural areas, but not always.

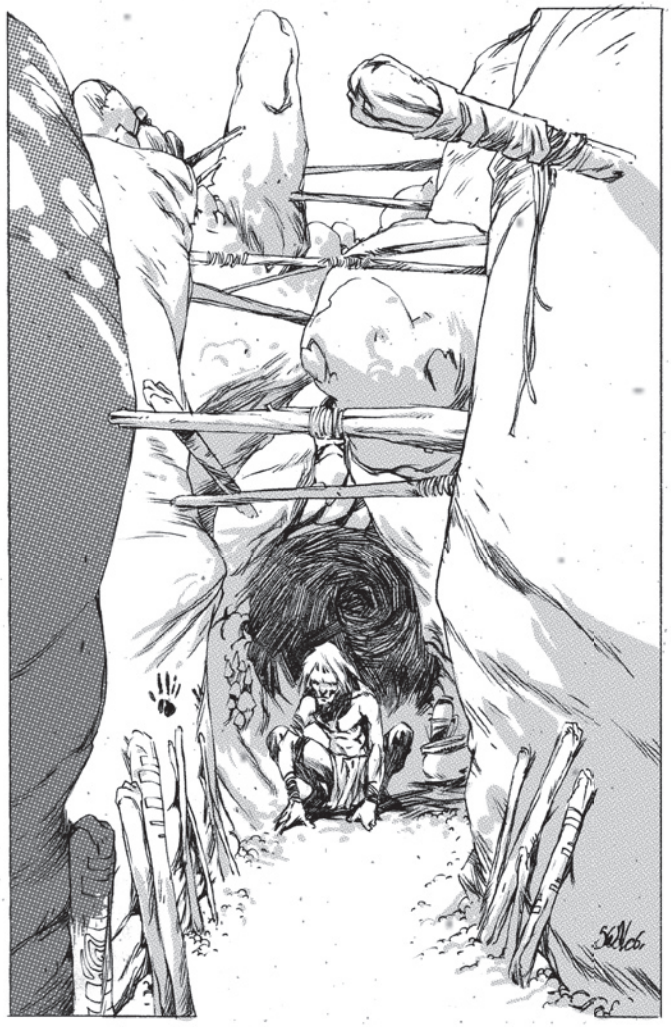
Among Thyrsus purists, caves are popular with the most primordial members. They appreciate the solidity and security offered by the earth, as well as the constant reminder of the cave in the Primal Wild in which they signed their names. While that might sound a little too rustic for some, the cave sanctums established by Thyrsus mages are much more sophisticated than just craggy holes in a mountain. Magic allows for some notable customization on the basic plan, and some such sanctums are envied even by Moros mages.

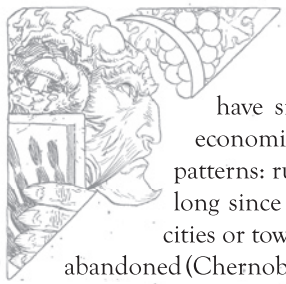
Island sanctums are more popular yet, and offer a range of benefits for the mages living on them: such sanctums are private in the extreme, they're less likely to have been completely despoiled by industry and they're surrounded by water, the element associated with the Thyrsus Path. Spirits have ample time to warn a mage when visitors are coming across the water toward the island, allowing the mage to cast a few last-minute spells before her company arrives.

Log cabins and adobe huts are popular as well with those who like the freedom that comes with building one's own lodging, and Thyrsus mages are well known for their fierce independence and self-reliance.

Increasingly, however, even Thyrsus mages have found themselves forced to reside in cities. For many, the city is the only home they've ever known, and even the powerful insights they gain in their Awakening aren't enough to push them from the crowded streets and foul air of a major metropolis. Even here, however, certain traits run deep among Shamans.

Thyrsus mages who live in cities seek out the greatest concentration of natural spirits and establish sanctums there. Traditionally, that has often meant parks or nature preserves of various types, but increasingly this includes the rusting ruins of places that were once settled and industrialized, but





have since been forgotten due to pollution, economic downturns or simple changes in traffic patterns: rusting factories and foundries that have long since been overtaken by saplings and vines, cities or towns that have, for whatever reason, been abandoned (Chernobyl is the largest and most recent example) and, ironically, cemeteries. With a keen eye for the local spirit life, the Thyrsus mage sees the area through completely different eyes than a Sleeper might. Many of the sights that might be seen in the neighborhoods that Thyrsus mages are drawn to — thorny briars taking over a pile of bricks that was once a house, a pack of feral dogs loping through deserted streets, slabs of concrete shattered by the roots of a tree, disused railroad ties being devoured by throngs of enormous toadstools, asphalt crumbling as it's pushed up by a sapling, a boarded up gas station collapsing beneath thick mats of kudzu and weeds — might be sources of concern (or even dread) for Sleepers (and many mages), but to mages on the Path of Ecstasy, these are hopeful signs of the world reverting to its natural, healthy state. Thyrsus mages are happy to help the process along.

Because such neighborhoods are often the least desirable in a city, Thyrsus mages often get away with paying very little for even large, comfortable sanctums. Within a few years of a Shaman establishing her sanctum in such an area, this decay and return to the natural state is often expedited as trees topple even more buildings into rubble and the rate at which the weeds grow far outstrips the city's capacity to keep them in check. Trees grow more vigorously; more raccoons, foxes, coyotes and deer find their way in. Such places can feel very much as though the urban landscape has been overwritten with a young piece of wilderness.

The Nature of Ecstatic Experience

Ecstasy is an important focus to those Awakening on this Path. Indeed, the Thyrsus Path is called the Path of Ecstasy for a reason.

Ecstatic states of mind are integral to a wide variety of spiritual paths, including Christianity, a religion that may seem somewhat bland to those who grew up with it as the status quo. Some among the Awakened never fully understand what ecstasy is, or can be, or how it is connected to magical practice until and unless they walk the Thyrsus Path.

Many mages must first discover what ecstasy is *not*. Despite what marketers may imply, ecstasy is not simply a fancy word for joy, delight or sexual pleasure. Ecstatic states aren't necessarily even enjoyable. (The notion of ecstasy being nothing but a pleasant sensation, or even feeling good, didn't even evolve until the 17th century, a development that still leaves many Thyrsus mages baffled.)

From an etymological perspective, ecstasy is, at its heart, the experience of being outside of oneself or, as some have defined it, out of one's head. In a mystic context, this sense of displacement is generally brought about by being forced out of control through an intimate experience of the sacred or the Realms Invisible. The Awakened (and a good number of Sleepers) have used spinning, dancing, chanting, drugs and meditation to bring about ecstatic states, and the practice is ancient. In ancient Greece, wild women called maenads, (literally, "frenzied ones"), worshipped the god Dionysus, and they were often described as being in a state of ecstasy that granted them the strength to rip apart wild panthers and bulls to offer to their god — an effect that Thyrsus mages still use today. These mad women carried staves wreathed with ivy and tipped with pinecones; this staff was called a thyrsis, from which this Path takes its name. Likewise, a *mambo* (high priestess) or *houngan* (high priest) in the Voudun (voodoo) tradition dances herself or himself into a state of ecstasy as a means of allowing the loa (gods or spirits) to speak or act through her or him. Speaking in tongues is an example of ecstatic practice in the Christian tradition.

Some mages, *especially* those who Awaken to this Path, see the state of ecstasy as a prerequisite for other manifestations of the sacred or divine, including healing, prophetic speech and myriad other miraculous phenomena. Through the state of ecstatic trance, the mage becomes a nexus between herself and the Supernal World (or, sometimes, the Shadow Realm), channeling the power of magic into the Fallen World. Some Shamans claim that they feel the power of the Primal Wild flow through them every time they attain an ecstatic state.

Again, from an ethymological perspective, ecstasy has a lot in common with enthusiasm, which means, literally, "to be filled with god."

A state of ecstasy is one in which the self gives way to something much grander than itself, allowing the sacred, however the subject defines it, to fill him, to speak or move through him; it is as if one life becomes a focus for the collective life force of the world. One way of perceiving ecstasy, then, is as a spiritually induced loss of control. While many Thyrsus mages see this as the root of their magical practice, ecstatic abandon isn't always a good thing any more than a storm or a volcano is a good thing.

The average Sleeper is made a little uncomfortable by the notion of ecstatic experience; voluntary loss of control doesn't jibe well with his comfortable bourgeois sensibilities. Ecstasy, like sex and death, is one of those edge topics that Sleepers in most cultures would rather talk around or avoid altogether, preferring to stay far from the edges, where it's safer.

And that's just fine with Thyrsus mages; they don't need pedestrians getting lost on their Path and giving it a bad name.

Even those on the Path of Ecstasy find ecstatic experience heady, strange and sometimes quite disturbing. Similar to opera, blue cheese and homosexuality, ecstasy is not for everyone. However, for those on the Thyrsus Path, having an understanding of the nature of ecstasy — if not firsthand experience of it — is a necessary step in understanding of the sacred and, by extension, the workings of magic.

Rites

As with much of the life of a Thyrsus mage, oblations and devotions focus on the natural and spiritual worlds.

Oblations

The oblations used by Shamans to help pull Mana from a Hallow are incredibly varied, although most of them are very physically oriented. Thyrsus oblations generally follow one of two paths: somatic oblations or ecstatic oblations.

Somatic Oblations

There are three means of generating energy in the body: breathing, eating and sex. Even when performed unconsciously, these practices have miraculous effects. When done *consciously* and *with intent*, they can be even more miraculous by allowing a mage to obtain Mana from a Hallow.

Breathing

Conscious control of the breath reminds Shamans of the rhythms of life and the wind through the trees. Breathing is one of the primordial links that keep mages connected to the living world. By assuming a meditative posture and practicing a sequence of breathing exercises, the mage is able to attune herself to the Hallow she's next to and let the Mana flow into her through the air she breathes.

Eating

The second of the three bonds that links a body to the physical world, eating, strikes some mages as an odd form of oblation, but Thyrsus mages defend eating's efficacy. It clearly works for them, so other mages have grown silent on the matter. Even mages who practice this ritual find it odd initially, but many claim that they wish they had learned the true sanctity of eating much earlier.

Just sitting down and eating potato chips by a Hallow, obviously, isn't going to work. The process is important, as is the food consumed. The two key factors in using eating (or drinking) as a focus for obtaining Mana are *what* is being eaten and *how* the mage is eating it.

The cult of Dionysus once again illustrates traditional Thyrsus practice. In ancient Greece, the maenads observed the violent rites of *sparagmos* and *omophagia* in their mountain festivals. *Sparagmos* is the ripping apart of a live animal, usually a bull or a panther, while *omophagia* is the ritual consumption of the bleeding red meat. The idea is that these animals were sacred to Dionysus, and since he dwelled within those creatures, some of his godly energy could be transferred to his followers so long as they consumed the flesh while it still twitched with life energy.

Modern mages on the Path of Ecstasy rarely engage in *sparagmos* and *omophagia*, but some of the principles of the eating oblation remain the same. The food must be ritually prepared, although the preparation can be anything from using a ritual knife to slice carrots to draining the blood of a goat into a sacred cup. Subsequently, the food or drink must be consumed with a hyper-awareness to the sanctity of the process, and the transformative (some might say alchemical) nature of digestion.

Sex (Tantra)

Jokes about Thyrsus sexual practice are much more common than these relatively rare practices actually warrant, but Shamans do use meditative sexual practices — alone and with others — as an oblation for gaining Mana from a Hallow. In the East, meditative sex is called tantra and is seen as a discipline of yoga. Tantric sex is not about getting off, or even about pleasure, per se, but about using the energy that sex generates in the body. The prolonged state of arousal and the sexual tension that builds over the course of this oblation helps pull Mana from the Hallow and into the mage's body.

Sexual release (i.e., orgasm) is not the point of this oblation, and most practitioners of tantra say orgasm defeats the purpose by releasing as much energy as the practice builds. Indian mages insist that retention of semen is key to using this oblation, meaning that no ejaculation is allowed at the end of the oblation — for at least a day — or the mage risks losing all the Mana he gained through this oblation.

Exercise

Although relatively new and not especially traditional, Thyrsus mages claim that simple but demanding physical exercise near a Hallow is just as effective at helping the mage extract Mana as most other oblations. As with all oblations, the key is to be mindful of the process and the goal. Exercise helps the mage become more aware of her body than she is in the process of day-to-day life, and that awareness lets her open her body to the flow of Mana from the Hallow.

Ecstatic Oblations

Among the most common oblations for those who follow this Path is the attainment of an ecstatic state that opens the self up to the Mana produced by the Hallow. By dispensing with conscious thought, the mage gets rid of the barriers that separate her from the spiritual power of the world.

The methods of attaining such ecstatic states vary radically. Some are still and quiet, others are boisterous and loud. All of them help quiet the conscious mind and pull in Mana.

Drumming

It might be the repetitive movement, it might be that the deep booming percussion, it might be the resonance that it has with the cycles of the world and the body, but drumming is among the most practiced means of reaching an ecstatic state. Drumming is also popular among mages because it's easy to combine with other magical practice, especially since

drumming is a common magical focus for a wide variety of spells used by those on the Path of Ecstasy.

Dancing

Dancing pulls the mage out of his head and into his body, allowing the mind to empty of conscious thought. According to Hindu lore, the dance of Shiva is the cycle of all cycles, the rhythm of all rhythms that maintains the pattern of the world. While dancing alone is certainly a viable means of channeling Mana, the presence of others entering trance states is a powerful aid to attaining such a state oneself. On occasions when all-Thyrsus cabals are performing their oblations together, usually half drum and half dance, taking the dancers and the drummers much further into the ecstatic state than they would have reached on their own. Having a focal point to the dance — an altar, a bonfire or the Hallow itself — helps impose some order on the dance and keeps the dancers from

Spinning

By spinning continually until the world seems to disappear in a blur, the mage opens himself up to ecstatic experience. The *darwushim*, or Whirling Dervishes of Persia call the act of spinning to attain ecstatic trance *semah*, or connection. When they spin, they say, they are the nexus between Heaven and Earth, and where Heaven and Earth meet, that is where power accumulates.

Katas

While not as popular in the west as in Asia, performing *katas* (precise, traditional patterns of combat moves) over and over again until the body can do them without conscious thought is a potent form of moving meditation and a proven method of attaining ecstatic states of consciousness. This meditation also helps the mage's combat prowess.

Chanting

Repeating one word or phrase, called a *mantra*, over and over again until the sound seems to dissolve and absorb the rest of the world is a popular means of entering trance. Again, this method is more common in Asia than in the West, though chanting has definitely gained footing in the West over the last several decades. ("Om" is one example of a common mantra, as is "nam-myoho-renge-kyo.")

Spirit Service

A mage observing this vow pledges (possibly even allows herself to be put under a *geas*) to serve either a single powerful spirit or one particular spirit court. So long as the mage dedicates herself to the commands of the Invisible Realm, she gains the benefits of this dedication.

Dedications

It takes a hardcore mage to maintain a dedication 24/7/365, especially those dedications practiced by Thyrsus mages. More commonly, Shamans leave their Awakened peers for a few weeks to recharge and return with their Mana stores replenished. Solitary mages living in the wild have been known to follow dedications their entire lives.

The Primal Vow

For the duration of this vow, the mage may not wear clothing, use tools or deal with spoken or written language. He may use magic, but no spells that use language or any tools that he did not make himself. He must hunt or gather any food he eats. The point is for the mage to turn himself over totally to his animalist nature. Any mage who has made the journey to the Watchtower of the Stone Book understands the risks — and the incredible sense of freedom — involved in this vow.

Given the hardcore nature of this vow, a Storyteller might want to award more than the usual Mana, but only if the vow is well roleplayed.

The Spirit Talker's Vow

From the outside, this may appear to be a vow of silence, but it is not. Alternatively, it may appear that the Shaman has lost his mind, but this is also not the case. The mage is simply barred from speaking with others on this side of the Gauntlet or using any language but the High Speech. By turning his attention wholly to the spirit world, the mage attunes himself to the secrets and blessings of the Realms Invisible.

The Stalker's Vow

Many big predators stalk their prey before moving in to make the kill. This vow requires the mage to name one animal (or individual) as her "prey," and for the duration of the vow, she hunts the other. The purpose of the vow is to keep the mage's predatory instincts sharp, although the mage is by no means obligated to kill her prey at the end. The thrill of the hunt alone is the point of this vow. A mage might break off at the very last moment (after gaining her Mana), or she might "count coup" as the American Indians did (counting coup means getting close enough to kill a target, but making a symbolic "kill" instead: stealing an item on the prey's person, or, in some cases, slapping or kissing the prey.)

The Reclaimer's Vow

The natural world has been rudely shoved aside by the artificial world of humans. A mage taking this vow works to undo that damage and takes every opportunity to undermine the efforts of humans to dominate the natural world. This might involve anything from planting fast-growing, invasive plant species (such as kudzu) in abandoned industrial areas to obliterating roads into wilderness areas. A wealthy mage practicing this vow might buy an entire subdivision, raze it and plant it with native species of trees and plants in order to return the area as much as possible to its natural state, while a

Shaman of lesser means might make do by physically removing old, disused railroad tracks or using magic to transform the asphalt of an unused road into ordinary dirt.

Society

Contrary to the stereotypes of the Awakened, "Thyrsus society" is not an oxymoron. Even these highly independent mages have a Path culture that they share, and, at times, this becomes very evident.

Gatherings

Though mages on the Path of Ecstasy are often viewed as antisocial, they are only that way in the company of those unable to understand the world as they do. Thyrsus mages have given up trying to explain the complex ways in which the deeds of the spirit courts underpin and influence life in the material realm. Other mages either accept that Shamans know what they're talking about or they don't. When among other Shamans and need not fear being misunderstood (or at least, not for the same reasons), or accused of being mad or immoral, Thyrsus mages are quite gregarious and, some have said, rowdy. All the isolation and solitude that Thyrsus mages live with is tossed aside with a vengeance.

Regardless of the constituency of a Thyrsus gathering, such events always have a tribal feel to them. These gatherings, which last at least a weekend, and sometimes as long as a month, are held as far from civilization as possible, and with all manner of spirits and animals posted as guards to keep Sleepers from wandering in. If at all possible, Thyrsus gatherings are held outdoors, but if the weather spirits refuse to cooperate, the group will build a lodge for the event, which they dismantle and erase any hint of once the gathering is over.

In the company of other Thyrsus mages, the normally guarded Shamans become open, animated and talkative—or unusually aggressive, if there's preexisting antipathy.

Introduce wine into the picture (and someone always does), and the scene grows more animated yet and, often, quite bawdy. Thyrsus gatherings have a playful, if somewhat feral and often perverse, vitality to them, and a carnival atmosphere often reigns, at least for the first few hours, until the gathering turns its attention to business. The largest of these gatherings are wild affairs and not for the frail or the faint of heart. Those who have been touched by the Primal Wild have little love for the safe, bourgeois values of comfort and politesse. Adrenaline, testosterone and wine are the three substances that most color the nature of a gathering of these mages. These are the mages who speak with the spirits, run with the wolves and drink with abandon. Wine and mead flow freely, and there's generally an animal sacrifice at the commencement of the gathering, a benediction of sorts, which will be used to feed the attendees later.

Fighting, fucking and all permutations of the two, in all styles, flavors, configurations and orientations, are the hallmark of these big, rowdy gatherings.

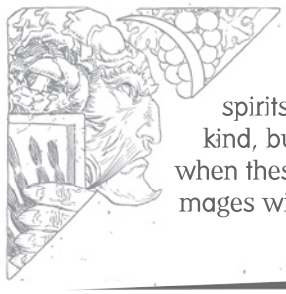
Orgies

Some other mages get self-righteous and haughty when they hear about what goes on at Thyrsus gatherings, demeaning them as mere orgies. Thyrsus mages just shrug it off and smile to themselves. Followers of the Path of Ecstasy, quite literally, invented the orgy, although the word's meaning has changed since it first came into usage.

At inception, the Greek word *orgia* referred to the wild drunken revels performed in honor of Dionysus, the god of life, wine and madness in the hills around Thrace. These rites encompassed all the frenzy, all the gore and all the crazed drunken revelry of a modern Thyrsus gathering and then some — and they were done mindfully and with the blessings of Dionysus. By Roman times, the spiritual and religious elements, and the truly ecstatic abandon, of the *orgia* had been replaced by simple, gratuitous and (worst of all) mindless binge drinking and sex. These were tedious affairs of one excess following another until those partaking were too bored or glutted to take any more. Given that kind of debasement, say Shamans, it's no wonder orgies got a bad reputation.

In recent years, the business portion of Thyrsus meetings has become somewhat somber. Sleepers, as a rule, have no awareness of what they're doing to the natural world of the spiritual landscape, and they abuse, pollute and corrupt the world at a terrifying rate. As interlocutors for humanity in the spirit courts, Thyrsus mages have had to suffer the outrage of spirits over human folly for more than two centuries, and the effect has taken its toll.

Even amidst the gloom, however, hope still thrives. No mage understands the sheer tenacity of Nature as well as Thyrsus mages. They're seeing hints of the natural world reasserting itself in both the Realms Invisible and material, and Shamans help where they can. Some of the events even now being planned by powerful



spirits will be devastating to humankind, but a great boon for Nature. And when these great changes come, Thyrsus mages will again be key to humankind's survival.

Violent Transitions

Thyrsus gathering are also used as occasions for pubic transitions. Shamans who have taken an apprentice announce it here; likewise, when an apprentice "graduates" from her apprenticeship, her mentor announces it here.

More gravely, old and infirm Thyrsus mages come to these events to bequeath their wisdom and accumulated wonders on younger mages. This is not a gifting ceremony, however, but a hunt. At the beginning of the gathering, the elder mage announces himself as prey. After the gathering's main business has been taken care of, the young mages at the gathering present themselves as hounds to hunt him. After some discussion and at least one long speech from the elder mage about all he has accomplished in his life, he darts into the trees (or the water or whatever cover the natural world provides), and the young challengers start the hunt. The one who tracks down the elder mage and delivers the killing blow inherits the elder mage's belongings and any spirit pacts the old mage may have established. This isn't just suicide on the part of the elder mage. The "hounds" put themselves at risk in this chase. They do this as a "pack" because elder mages are much too dangerous for one young mage to defeat alone. Sometimes, the younger mages die in their pursuit. Sometimes, the elder mage survives. Whatever the outcome, no one is forced to do anything, and no apologies are made for anything that happens in one of these hunts. (In addition, a character who kills under these circumstances does not suffer from Wisdom degeneration.) And when a young mage comes out of the hunt with several powerful Fetishes, an Artifact and a powerful familiar, no one begrudges him these things, because he earned them the old-fashioned way.

Paths

Thyrsus mages always *want* to think that other mages will understand the Shaman perspective. They are, after all, fellow mages, aware of the full glory and magic of the world. The problem is that other mages are not always as tuned in to the same phenomena as the Shamans. Much of Shamans' behavior depends on events in the Realms Invisible, and mages who cannot sense those events may still see the mage's behavior as bizarre or irrational.

When these other mages turn out to be just as blind to the Shadow Realm as most Sleepers, those on the Path of Ecstasy often find themselves frustrated, even angry. Shamans are accustomed to using isolation as a means of escaping others, and mages of other Paths may find Thyrsus mages obstinate, quiet and overly guarded. For their part, Shamans entertain a variety of viewpoints on other mages.

Acanthus

As a general rule, Thyrsus mages get along well with those from the Thistle Path. They traditionally make excellent first impressions on one another, and bond quickly. Many great magical alliances take place between mages of these two Paths — at least in the short term. Longer alliances, unfortunately, never quite seem to work out.

Acanthus mages understand a thing or two about not being understood, and even if they don't see the Shadow Realm or understand the spirit world with the same acuity as Thyrsus, Enchanters' happy-go-lucky approach to the world ensures that the last thing they would do is pass judgment on Shamans, which is fundamental in any dealings with Thyrsus mages.

Magically, the strengths of the Thistle Path make an excellent complement to those of Shamans. A team in which Enchanters look ahead and manage matters of Fate while Shamans attend to spiritual matters and, when necessary, healing, is solid (if a little heavy on the defensive side of things). Thyrsus mages are often interested in learning the Fate Arcanum, while many Acanthus find Spirit to be a good complement to their magic, giving mages of these two Paths plenty of reason to associate.

If this combination has any weakness, it's in the fact that Acanthus don't make as good of workmates as they do playmates. They don't often share the dedication, drive and obsessive staying power of Shamans. A mage on the Thistle Path might be a Shaman's most reliable ally, or even a best friend or lover, for a number of years even, but when the Acanthus' attention wanders to the next source of wonder, there's little the Thyrsus mage can do to get that attention back; if the job wasn't been finished before the Enchanter lost interest, well, that's the Shaman's problem now. Some Shamans have learned this the hard way; others have heard enough of the gossip to guard themselves against the Enchanters' charm.

On the other hand, Acanthus mages often find that Thyrsus mages play too rough and take things too far for the Enchanters' comfort.

Moros

It would be difficult for two Paths to be more different than Thyrsus and Moros, although this lack of common ground is so total that the two Paths don't even have that much to fight about. They don't have enough in common even to have meaningful conflict. Ironically, even when the see things similarly, they do so for entirely different reasons.

From the viewpoint of Shamans, Moros are obsessed with material shells — dead things and diamonds and gold — while mages on the Path of Ecstasy are concerned with life and passion and the spirits that inhabit those vessels. The difficulty

with alliances between Moros and Thyrsus mages is that the former are, at heart, bankers, while the latter are eccentric holy men (and women). These differences extend well beyond the magical praxes of the two Paths. Moros mages are frequently rich, while Thyrsus mages are, more often than not, poor and often alienated from their own culture. Thyrsus mages are champions of the natural cycle, while Moros mages always seem to be looking for ways to break or twist it. Moros mages never think to ask the spirit of a lead bar if it wants to be a gold ingot, any more than they explain to corpses that they're being prevented from rotting normally so that they can do work for Necromancers.

The philosophies of the Moros and Thyrsus Paths are not in conflict, as one might expect, but they have very little in common. They go in the same direction, but they're parallel, never converging. The passion and vivacity of Thyrsus mages makes those on the Path of Doom uncomfortable. In a Moros sanctum, a Thyrsus mage often feels like an energetic five year old in a rich, estranged grandmother's home full of expensive antiques.

When circumstances dictate, however, and interpersonal philosophical differences are forgotten, Moros and Thyrsus mages can operate together *very* effectively, with Necromancers handling offense and Thyrsus mages taking care of defense. Once the uniting impetus is dealt with, however, mages of both Paths are likely to ignore each other again as much as possible.

Mastigos

No one familiar with the stereotypes of Warlocks — including Thyrsus mages themselves — would ever expect Mastigos to become Thyrsus allies under any but the most urgent circumstances. Shamans tend to dislike Warlocks instantly, often just on the basis of their reputations. Warlocks come across as too well groomed, too phony and too slick, almost the antithesis of those on the Path of Ecstasy. The Warlocks' reputation as manipulators and mind rapists doesn't incline Shamans to trust Warlocks either. Making matters worse is the fact that Thyrsus mages find the Mind Arcanum particularly challenging to learn, making them feel, accurately or otherwise, as if they're at a pronounced disadvantage in all dealings with those on the Path of Scourging. First meetings between Thyrsus and Mastigos mages almost seem to have been cursed, as the meetings regularly go horribly awry; many relationships between mages on these two Paths never get beyond the initial dislike.

Curiously, if Thyrsus mages are forced to work with Mastigos mages, and if they allow themselves to relax a bit, something odd happens: they often find that, appearances and stereotypes aside, they have a great deal in common. Underneath the surface, mages of both Paths struggle to maintain control against the urges that well up within them and threaten to dominate their lives. Moreover, Thyrsus mages respect the individualism of those who follow the Mastigos Path. Shamans may not always like how Warlocks manifest this independence, but Shamans definitely respect it. Both Paths also share an understanding that survival is a struggle that can only be won (if at all) through excellence.

On the other hand, Mastigos mages appreciate that Thyrsus are blunt and direct in their words and, as Mastigos see it, trustworthy in ways that they and other Warlocks are not. With the Shamans' sensitivity to the Shadow Realm, Shamans are able to see that Warlocks are not the thralls to demons that lore sometimes accuses Warlocks of being; likewise, Warlocks can use the Mind Arcanum to see that Thyrsus mages aren't as crazy as they might appear on first meeting. Furthermore, many Mastigos are fascinated by the Spirit Arcanum, and they may see Thyrsus as worthy teachers of that lore, while Shamans are often inclined to learn more about the Mind Arcanum.

Historically speaking, some of the longest-term and most powerful alliances between the Awakened have formed between mages of these two Paths — once they've gotten past the initial antagonism and antipathy.

Obrimos

If there could be said to be one Path that Thyrsus mages generally dislike, and actively find themselves in conflict with, that Path would be Obrimos. Because of frequent ostracism and isolation, Shamans are acutely sensitive to feeling judged by others, and Obrimos mages come across as more judgmental than any other mages. The self-assuredness of Theurgists comes across to Shamans as arrogance and self-righteousness. Theurgists' apparent eagerness to back their opinions up with violence and dangerous magic is one further antagonism that angers those on the Path of Ecstasy.

Thyrsus mages often feel that the mages on the Path of the Mighty are trying to change, "fix" or correct Shamans, and they don't feel like they *need* to be fixed. Though Obrimos can't see spirits nearly so well as Shamans, Theurgists rarely have any qualms about speaking for God (or several of them). The unearned arrogance of that position results in the unmitigated contempt of Thyrsus mages.

The plain-spoken pragmatism and easy morals of Thyrsus mages, on the other hand, sometimes seems like deliberate provocation to Theurgists, who simply want order.

Making matters worse, mages of the two Paths regularly find themselves forced to work together in the Adamantine Arrow, the order favored by many mages of both Paths. Struggles for power between the mages of these two Paths are not uncommon within the ranks of that order.

Orders

Left to their own devices, Shamans are content to keep their own company — or, more accurately, the company of

the spirits they're fond of entertaining. The world, however, seems not to leave them to their own devices nearly as often as they would like. The World of Darkness is a dangerous place for a solitary mage, and it often requires mages to join orders for safety, whether the fit is perfect or not.

Due to their healing abilities, Shamans are welcome in all orders. Thyrsus mages have been known to join all five of the major orders although not in equal numbers. Moreover, they've also been known to join small, fringe orders as well, when it serves their individual purposes.

While Shamans join orders when circumstances require it, there are still more unaffiliated, solitary mages on the Path of Ecstasy than any other Path.

Adamantine Arrow

Shamans are strongly drawn to the Adamantine Arrow. Its hard-edged approach to the world is reminiscent of the lessons taught by the Primal Wild: existence *is* war; enlightenment *is* honor, and adaptability *is* strength. Life is hard and, unless you're very strong or very cunning, short as well. This is a blunt, unapologetic approach that appeals to the blunt, unapologetic mages traveling the Thyrsus Path.

All wars have casualties, and the Thyrsus ability to heal is especially valued among the mages of the Adamantine Arrow. Accordingly, the order has been known to go to great lengths to recruit an experienced (and sometimes even not so experienced) Shaman into its ranks.

At its core, the constant conflict of life in the Arrow resonates powerfully with the survival of the fittest ethic shared by those on the Path of Ecstasy. Conflict hones their skills and gives meaning and focus to their lives in a way that nothing else does.

The only factor that makes membership in the Adamantine Arrow less desirable is the heavy representation of Obrimos mages, who always rub Shamans the wrong way.

Free Council

Though the Free Council constantly extends its invitation, few on the Path of Ecstasy are drawn to this order.

The ideals of the Free Council are the ideals of *very* few Shamans. Those on the Path of Ecstasy are inherently anarchistic; so long as they can control their own lives — and magic generally grants them that control — political systems don't do much for them. Thyrsus mages don't generally have a problem with hierarchy, for example. As they see it, all of nature acknowledges a hierarchy; it's called "the food chain," and other forms of organization are inherently artificial, and therefore suspect. Democracy, one of the libertines' much-vaunted high ideals, is seen by most on the Path of Ecstasy as unnatural and wrong-headed. Any system that grants the weak, the lazy and the stupid an equal vote to the strong, ambitious and wise, is likely to end up in confusion, mediocrity and, ultimately, violence as natural principles reassert themselves.

The notion of "modernizing" magic doesn't appeal to many Thyrsus mages, either. The occasional techgnostic mage aside, few on the Path of Ecstasy are all that interested in performing magic with computers or working with the shallow little spirits of automobiles or televisions. Certainly, there are new and original applications of the Life and Spirit Arcana, and no, there's nothing that forces Thyrsus mages to practice magic the old way, but a Shaman's connection to the Primal Wild does *nothing* to interest her in any of those things.

Guardians of the Veil

There's not much that unites Thyrsus mages and members of the Guardians of the Veil, although both Thyrsus mages and the Guardians of the Veil place a high emphasis on simple competence and tend toward meritocratic outlooks.

Shamans are direct and simple people who operate on intuition and instinct. Guardians of the Veil don't value those traits very highly, preferring to be weavers of intricate webs of deceit. Likewise, many Guardians ignore the present moment, preferring to look off toward the day when their mythical "Hieromagus" comes to save them from their own questionable ethics.

Certain factions of the Guardians, such as the Faceless, are often willing to offer young Shamans *anything* to join the Guardians of the Veil, but remarkably few Thyrsus mages take them up on it. Only the Free Council is less popular among Shamans, and that's not by much.

Mysterium

Thyrsus mages are powerfully drawn to the hunt. They like having a definite goal to work toward, and they savor the climactic moment when they finally take possession of the item they sought. The Mysterium gives them the opportunity to hunt for Atlantean lore and artifacts in a variety of difficult environments, and the Shamans' talent for adapting to their surroundings makes them ideal for such work.

As it happens, Shamans are well prepared on many fronts to join the Mysterium's activities. Their rapport with spirits can often provide leads to new lore or items that no other mage can match. In conjunction with their ability to heal themselves and their comrades, control animals, augment their physical abilities and even change their shape, Thyrsus mages are particularly well suited to the kind of work the Mysterium performs.

Although Shamans are often physically powerful, the Mysterium tends to appeal to the Path's more social and intellectual members who see "survival of the fittest" playing out slightly differently among the Awakened, where lore and understanding of the Arcana have a much greater impact on "fitness" than brute strength, speed, or even cunning.

One of the key perks of Mysterium membership is the lore and survival knowledge to which the order's members are privy. Thyrsus mages are particularly attracted to any knowledge that allows them to survive a broader range of challenges.

Silver Ladder

For the most part, Thyrsus mages don't fancy themselves leaders — they lead themselves and take responsibility for their own behavior (and wish others would do the same). They are shamans, and they do not wish to engage in the kinds of intrigue and game-playing that the Silver Ladder pushes as part of its crusade for order and power.

Many mages on the Thyrsus Path also don't have any real driving urge to help exalt the unAwakened. Sleepers, as far as Shamans are concerned, have made their own bed, and if Sleepers have no problem with judging and ostracizing *them*, then Shamans are under no obligation to do Sleepers any favors.

Still, some mages on the Path of Ecstasy join the Silver Ladder because they are exactly the type of mages who *ought* to be leading the way among the Awakened, fearing that mages of any other Path might cause more harm than good by leading the Awakened in the wrong direction.

Sleepers

There is no single Thyrsus view on Sleepers, although Shamans' experience of Awakening, the perspectives they gain on the world through their Arcana and how they're treated by their local communities do have a strong impact on how they view the unAwakened.

Anger: Many Shamans have had the painful experience of being rejected by their Sleeper communities, including their families, who can't see that the changes caused by their Awakening represent a healthy, powerful development. Many of these followers of the Thyrsus Path harbor resentment because of that experience. Shamans who suffer this kind of ostracism are among the least sympathetic to Sleepers, sometimes wholly antagonistic.

These mages see the desecration of Nature by humanity as an unforgivable crime, and feel that the unAwakened should suffer the consequences.

These mages often side with the spirit courts against humanity, and believe that the unAwakened should suffer the consequences for their desecration of the natural world.

Compassion: Those Thyrsus mages who Awaken into more compassionate communities, and who are accepted by their families and friends, often find themselves feeling particularly caring toward the Sleepers around them. These mages feel that the ability to heal others with Life magic comes with an inherent responsibility to do so. They are also among the most ardent defenders of humankind in the spirit courts.

Frustration: Most Thyrsus assume an amoral quality after their journey to the Primal Wild. They see the human race in terms of broad strokes. Unnatural or puritanical strictures against euthanasia of the sick and infirm or premarital sex just strike them as stupid and unnatural. A Shaman sees these things as self-evident, and many Thyrsus mages find Sleepers (particularly those on a morality crusade) to be insufferable: one more reason to lead the solitary life that so many of these mages are drawn to.

Character Creation

The character concepts put forth in the Thyrsus Path description in **Mage: The Awakening** suggested a number of Thyrsus concepts without providing any explanation for them. This section details those concept ideas more fully and provides more insight into how to play such a character more fully.

Healer

Every culture has legends of gifted magic men and women who know the mysteries of banishing disease, closing wounds and expediting healing. Many of these healers might also have cures for spiritual ailments, such as the stolen souls and possession. Native Americans and other indigenous peoples have tales of these people, but Christian faith healers, Guatamalan *curanderos* and other Awakened might also fall into this categories. Those on the Thyrsus Path form the hard nucleus of this legend. They are the ones sought out by their tribe when the chief is ailing or the community's best hunter is injured. If they've been welcomed into the tribe despite their altered post–Awakening outlook, they might take this role out of sheer compassion. If they've been driven out for their strange ways, they might require a hefty incentive — food, money, favors — to do the tribe any favors. In this case, "tribe" can be broadly interpreted to refer to the mage's community. "Tribe" needn't literally denote an Indian tribe.

Witch Doctor

A somewhat less ethical variant of the healer, the witch doctor is a mage skilled in the Life and Spirit Arcana who uses his knowledge not just to heal, but to harm as well. The witch doctor is just as likely to command a spirit to possess a person as to perform an exorcism, to blight crops as well as heal an injury.

Where the healer is motivated by a sense of compassion for those around him, the witch doctor is more often driven by the urge for revenge or the acquisition of power. He is unfailingly generous to his supporters but cruel to those who would stand in his way, leaving no question which side it's better to be on.

Visionary Lunatic

Once one speaks with spirits, stopping can be difficult, even if others are around. These mages can't quite distinguish the difference between spirits and other mortals, and so their behavior, from this side of the Gauntlet seems erratic, bizarre, even



schizophrenic. Dodging to avoid a wind spirit or speaking to a Presence that no one else can see is a quick way to earn a reputation as crazy and possibly dangerous, or, in our culture, labeled as psychotic and institutionalized.

But these mages *aren't* insane; they just see more than their peers. The tradeoff is that they acquire knowledge that others can't. These mages see the precursors to events in the spirit realm before those events manifest in the material realm. They can ask the wind what the weather has in store, or even make a request for particular weather. They can command spirits to tell them things that nobody on this side of the Gauntlet will divulge, making them excellent investigators. They become keepers of secrets and chart their course not just according to what makes sense in the material realm, but in the Realm Invisible as well, which often has more validity, particularly in the long run.

Berserker

These mages invite the spirits of powerful animals, and sometimes other potent entities, to ride them into battle, thereby assuming some of the spirit's power in exchange for giving the spirit access to the material realm without having to materialize. The mage gains power according to the nature of the spirit riding them. A mage being ridden by a grizzly bear spirit might be bigger, stronger, more violent and less susceptible to pain, while a mage ridden by a thunder spirit might inflict an electrical shock on an enemy with lightning every time his fist or weapon hits. This is an old, and largely abandoned magical practice in the modern age, largely because mages have come to see the practice of giving spirits that much control somewhat dangerous, regardless of the power such an arrangement provides them.

While the advantages are quite evident and appealing, the magic of the berserker comes at a cost. The primary disadvantage of being a berserker is that spirits tend not to be particularly gentle with mortal bodies, and turning oneself over entirely to a spirit has a track record of turning out badly.

Some berserkers have specific animal spirits, possibly a familiar or other trusted spirit, that the berserkers summon into themselves to assure that they are not ridden recklessly by spirits. Shamans with the ability to alter their bodies often shape their forms to more closely match that of the riding spirits, often giving themselves yet another weapon to wield against their enemies.

Awakened Veterinarian

This kind of Shaman works to heal (or perhaps sculpt) both an animal's body and its soul. By speaking with an animal's spirit, and possibly empowering the spirit with Essence, the mage can often heal an afflicted animal from the inside out, by sculpting its spirit to more closely match the ideal of that animal type, and then using Life magic to bring the body into line with the idealized spirit.

While this may sound entirely noble, there are rumors of magically-enhanced vets of this sort getting enormous money by "enhancing" any animal from racehorses to fighting dogs. While very few mages would consider this acceptable behavior, the realities of the World of Darkness are not always noble.

These mages might also use their Arcana to create a pack of powerful animals to do the mages' bidding, whether a pack of ferocious dogs or a murder of crows to spy on enemies. Such characters, obviously, would likely have quite a bit of Animal Ken.

Herbalist

The best way to determine what a plant's useful applications are is to ask it. The herbalist, then, keeps a free and open dialogue with all the plants in her vicinity, allowing her to know exactly which plant will mute the symptoms of the flu,

how much of a plant's root is necessary to end an unwanted pregnancy and which toadstool will bring death most quickly to an enemy. Such mages are likely to know more about the area they live in than even the oldest elder of an area. If they're so knowledgeable about the local plants, there's also a good chance that the mages might have also spoken with the local rivers, roads and hills to learn all that can be learned about a place. This archetype is often combined with the visionary lunatic, but doesn't have to be.

The herbalist might also use Life magic on plants to give them a bit more mobility, doing with plants what the Awakened veterinarian above does with animals.

Witch

The traditional goddess-worshipping Wiccan is a good match for the Thyrsus Path. Reverence of nature comes easily to those who can see the infinite wonders of the Realm Invisible and actually speak with Presences that might be described as gods. Skill in the Life and Spirit Arcana gives these mages other powers attributed to witches by myth and legend as well. They can change themselves into cats or bats or hex others by sending malevolent spirits after them, or they can heal a community by guiding it back toward harmony with the Realm Invisible.

The outdated definition of a witch can also be stretched to fit mages on the Path of Ecstasy. The old woman who lives on the outskirts of the village and gets accused of curdling her neighbors' milk fits the experience of many Shamans who are ostracized from their communities after their Awakening. These are the mages who grow bitter about their banishment and seek vengeance on those who forced them from their place in the community. Just as the Life Arcanum can be used to help a community, so can this Arcanum be used to make the community suffer. Old wounds can be reopened, bones can be twisted and bent and animals can be made to turn on their owners. This isn't one of the prouder archetypes of the Thyrsus Path, but it's more common than many Shamans are comfortable admitting to.

Eco-Saboteur

Seeing the natural world as keenly as they do, many Shamans find that they cannot bear to see the folly that humankind is perpetrating on the natural world: the ancient cycles that humans casually disrupt, the torment humans cause in the spirit world and the pain humans bring on themselves by refusing to live in harmony with the spirit world right beyond their own noses.

In an attempt to force the issue, some Shamans take matters into their own hands and try to force others to live in accordance with principles that are more harmonious with the spiritual world — using any means necessary to do so. A mage might use his magic to destroy bulldozers that are endangering a Hallow, or bedevil a team of loggers intent on cutting down a sacred grove. Some of these mages use as little magic as they can get away with. Others come to believe that only by paying a blood price will humankind learn; they have no qualms about killing if it means getting their message across.

Exorcist

There are evil spirits roaming the world just as there are benevolent ones. Some of these spirits like the feeling of power they get from riding mortal hosts; others like to cause mayhem on the physical world in reprisal for the havoc that Sleepers, through their ignorance, are inflicting on the Realm Invisible. Some mages dedicate themselves to defending the integrity of the Gauntlet and seeking out Sleepers who have been possessed by these trespassing spirits and freeing these Sleepers of their unwanted riders. While noble, this is a rough path for a mage to travel. Not only does the Shaman earn the enmity of every malevolent spirit she exorcises, but she often finds herself working difficult magic for the most meager of rewards. Thyrsus mages in Asia, particularly those raised in the Tao and Shinto faiths are known to adopt this approach far more often than mages in the west (which, along with the focus on *feng shui*, might explain why the Invisible Realm is in much better shape in Asia than in the West).

New Merits

The Merits listed below are specific to characters on the Thyrsus Path, unique to them due to their connection to the Watchtower of the Stone Book and the Primal Wild.

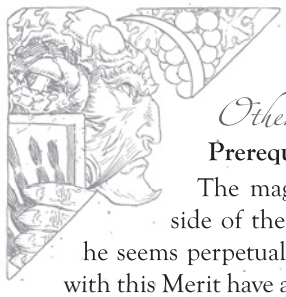
Identity Anchor (●●)

One of the perils of taking on another shape is the risk of becoming so lost in the new shape that the mage forgets her true identity. This Merit grants the mage an unerring knowledge of who she is that goes right down to the core of her being. The flesh may take this form and that form, but the mage always knows who she is and how to get back to her native form, whether the magic that made her assume the new shape is her own or a spell cast on her by another.

Master Exorcist (●●)

Prerequisite: Spirit •••

Due to the mage's deep understanding of the Spirit Arcanum, the mage has an innate understanding of the techniques spirits use to invade material bodies, allowing him to more easily break those bonds. Any time a mage with this Merit performs an exorcism, his player adds three additional dice to the pool. This Merit also grants the mage three additional dice to resist being possessed himself.



Otherwordly Eyes (●●)

Prerequisite: Spirit •

The mage has trouble staying focused on this side of the Gauntlet. His attention wanders, and he seems perpetually distracted — because he is. Shamans with this Merit have an easier time focusing on events on the other side of the Gauntlet, but at the cost of attending to the material world around them.

A mage with this Merit gains two extra dice for all rolls to sense events in the Realm Invisible, but at the cost of two dice from all perception dice pools pertaining to anything in the material realm. This otherworldly awareness can be used in any scene, but once invoked, this Merit cannot be dismissed for the rest of the scene.

This is a common Merit (some might say affliction) for those mages of the Dreamspeaker Legacy.

Predator's Innocence (●●●)

A wolf does not degenerate when it kills its prey; likewise, the Thyrsus mage doesn't suffer when she makes a clean and natural killing. A character with this Merit does not need to make degeneration rolls for simple killing, *especially* in self-defense. If the mage shows particular malice, if she tortures the subject before killing him or if she kills for morally questionable reasons, then the Storyteller might rule that a degeneration check is necessary.

Note that just because the mage's Wisdom doesn't suffer doesn't make killing right or acceptable by society's standards, and a mage who makes a habit of killing will have other consequences to worry about.

If the Storyteller judges that the player is just using this Merit as an excuse to have his character kill wantonly, the Storyteller is free to take this Merit away.

Long Shifting (●●●)

The mage is particularly comfortable in the animal forms he assumes, and his magic lasts longer than other mages who lack his mastery of shapeshifting. A mage with this Merit can worry less about awkwardly timed transformations back to human form (while the mage is flying as an eagle, for example), and he need not worry about the strain of repeated casting under circumstances where recasting a spell might be difficult.

For purposes of determining how long the mage can remain in a magically assumed form, count the mage's understanding of the Life Arcanum as two higher than it actually is. This explicitly gives the mage access to Advanced Prolongation (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 120) for all spells that shift his own flesh.

Spirit Status (●●, ●●●● or ●●●●●)

As masters of spirit lore and ambassadors to the spirit courts, Shamans often have additional clout they can bring to bear when performing magic that controls spirits. Whether the mage is the beneficiary of some old pact he or a mentor made or due to some item he possesses, the mage has standing in the spirit courts far beyond what most mortals can aspire to. Every two points of this Merit negates one –1 modifier from the Spiritual Hierarchy table (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 317) when casting magic that affects spirits. With five dots, this Merit negates up to three dice worth of penalties.

Additional Familiars (●●)

Just as Odin had Hugin *and* Munin *and* Sleipnir, some Thyrsus mages are able to have multiple familiars. The mage may continue to buy additional familiars after character creation. The mage's player must buy them all separately with experience points, but there's no limit to the number of familiars a mage with this Merit may acquire. Though many familiars would slow the mage's growth in other areas, a mage could theoretically surround herself with a veritable brood of familiars in this way.

Potent Familiar (●●)

Owing to the mage's (or perhaps his mentor's) facility with the Spirit Arcanum, or perhaps some especially difficult vision quest the mage completed in the Realms Invisible, the Shaman's familiar is more powerful than most beginning familiars. This may be just the advantage a mage needs to survive the difficult early days after his Awakening.

This Merit provides the mage with 15 extra "experience points" that he can use *only* to upgrade his familiar. This Merit may be purchased multiple times, but may only be purchased at character creation. After that, the mage must raise his familiar's stats by spending experience points accrued during play.

Feral Mien (●●●)

There's something bestial and untamed about the mage, as though she's been living with a pack of wolves or swimming with sharks. She has a pronounced animalist tendency in the way she moves, or in certain mannerisms she possesses. Her voice may have a lot of growl or purr in it, or the way she moves might be lithe like a cat or subtly predatory on an unconscious level. Whatever the specifics, the player gains three additional dice on all Intimidation and Seduction rolls. Many mages with this Merit also have the Friend of Beasts Merit (below).

Friend of Beasts (● or ●●)

The mage has less of the human world about him and sees the world more as an animal thanks to the mage's journey to the Primal Wild. Animals sense this, whether by scent or some other awareness, and they accept him as one of their own. When rolling Animal Ken, the character's player adds three extra dice to the dice pool being rolled. A mage taking the single dot version of this Merit is unable to hide his bestial nature around others and loses two dice from all Socialize rolls.

Merits Off the Path

These new Merits aren't actually unique to Thyrsus mages so much as they're indigenous to that Path. In the centuries since their discovery, invention or perfection, these Merits have surely been dragged off the Path of Ecstasy by other mages. Even so, the reputation that surrounds the knacks and know-how that these Merits model is richly Thyrsus. A Thyrsus mage might make note of his Path's importance when one of these Merits is displayed in his presence ("You know that's a trick of my Watchtower, right?") or he might use it to get closer to the practitioner ("Where'd you learn how to do that?"). In some cities, these Merits may be traditional practices of the Thyrsus, taught only to their own kind. In other cities, these Merits are secret advantages kept by clubs or cabals of shape-changing willworkers regardless of Path or Order. To learn one of these Merits, a mage must earn the trust of someone who knows its secrets — and then be worth the time she'll spend teaching it.

In terms of game mechanics, these Merits can be purchased by non-Thyrsus mages like any other Merit. They have obvious value to mages Awakened by the Stone Book, but any willworker that interacts with the spirit world or changes his own body might make use of them. At the Storyteller's discretion, however, additional prerequisites may be added to any of these Merits to reflect the culture and customs of the chronicle's local setting. If, for example, the only mages (Thyrsus or not) who know a coveted Merit are members of a single Order, a mage may be required to earn at least one dot in that Order's Status before he is deemed worthy of being taught.

NEOCOLOGISTS

Neocologists are convinced that nature, as they know and revere it, is effectively doomed by the actions of humanity. Rather than watch the spirits they know wither and die away, however, Neocologists seek to prevent this both by reclaiming areas of the industrialized world and by infusing as much of the magical and spiritual world as possible into the artificial world, creating a synthesis of the natural and the artificial. Neocologists imagine themselves as a spiritual evacuation force helping to place spirits into new phenomena and transfer natural principles into artificial vessels.

If they can't reclaim the natural world entirely, they hope at least to see that the mechanized and artificial world follows the same natural principles that have guided the world thus far — the same ancient cycles, survival of the fittest, self-replication and so on.

The Legacy's name is a portmanteau combining neo (new) and ecology, suggesting that they're creating a whole new synthesis through their work.

There has been little time for any wide-scale results to come from the Neocologists' efforts. The Legacy came about in the late 19th century, a response by a handful of British mages — alleged inheritors of the secrets of Atlantis, by way of the druids — to the devastation caused by the Industrial Revolution. Though industry was yet young, Shamans with access to the Time Arcanum saw that the outlook for the natural world only got worse the further into the future one looked, and so it was decided that something had to be done. The industrialization of the world wasn't about to be stopped, even by the Awakened, but something had to happen if the natural and spiritual landscape was to survive. Ultimately, Neocologists chose to fuse the natural and artificial worlds, and where that wouldn't work, they would endeavor to preserve enough of true nature so that when civilization collapses on itself, there will be enough of the natural world to act as a seed for renewal.

Despite the Path they come from, Neocologists are rigidly civilized (or they try to present themselves as such, until their passions nudge aside the carefully groomed masks they like to wear). This derives from the Legacy's history more than anything. The deeply ingrained sense of Victorian propriety was such that many Thyrsus mages couldn't — or wouldn't — turn their backs on modernity, despite seeing the toll it was taking on the bodies and spirits of urbanites and on the natural world itself. Instead, Neocologists pledged themselves to preserving the *principles* of nature — and the possibility of regrowth and renewal once the cycle of industrialism collapsed upon itself. Their goal is

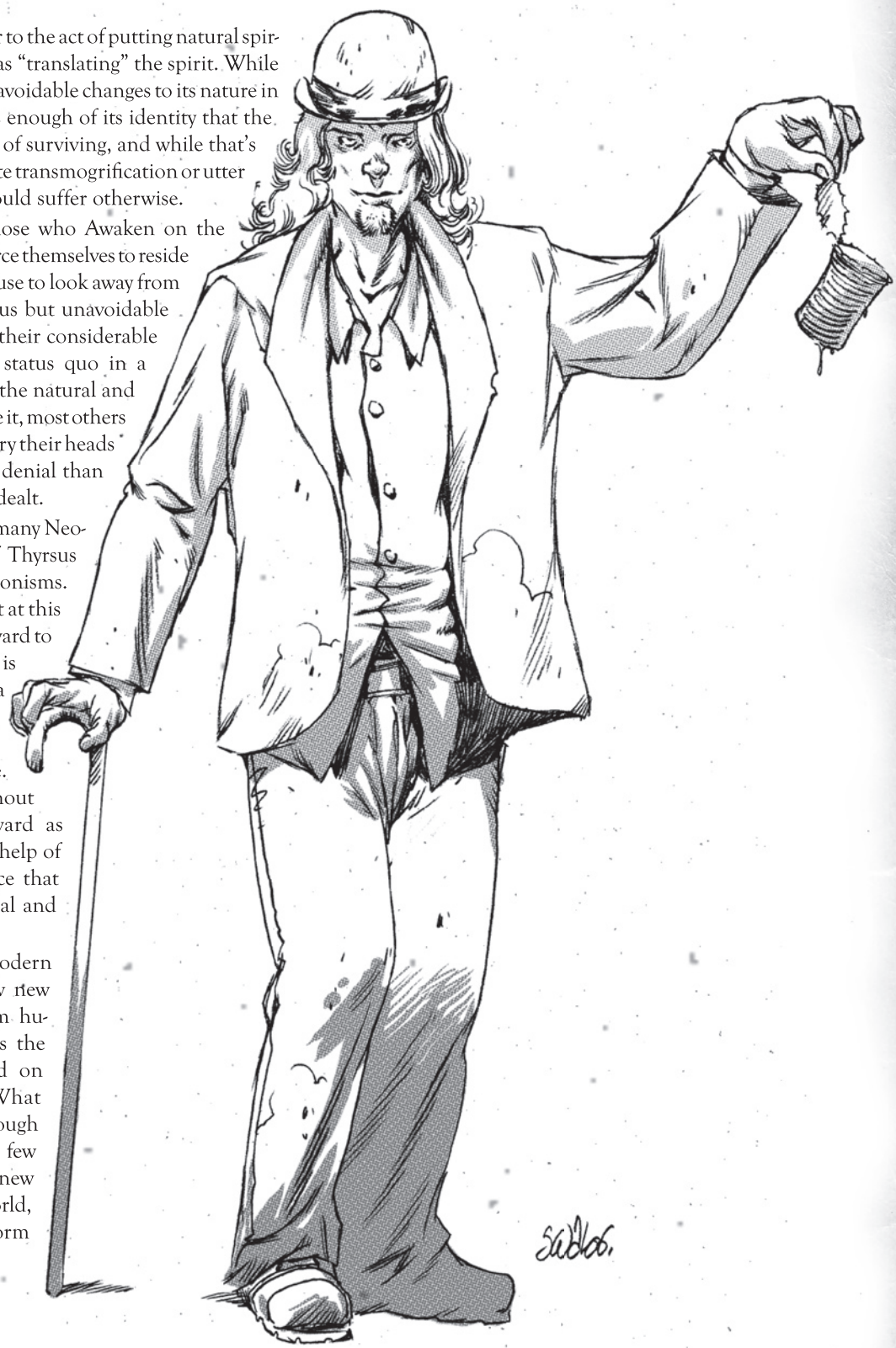
to defend as much of the natural spirit world as possible, by hiding it within the industrialized world itself, or in the interstices between industrialized zones.

Neocologists refer to the act of putting natural spirits into human-made vessels as "translating" the spirit. While the spirit undergoes some unavoidable changes to its nature in the process, the spirit retains enough of its identity that the spirit stands a decent chance of surviving, and while that's not much, it beats the complete transmogrification or utter dissolution that the spirit would suffer otherwise.

Unlike the majority of those who Awaken on the Thyrsus Path, Neocologists force themselves to reside in the modern world, and refuse to look away from what they see as a horrendous but unavoidable development. They channel their considerable passions into changing the status quo in a direction that gives hope for the natural and spiritual landscape. As they see it, most others on their Path would rather bury their heads in the sand and live a life of denial than play the hands they've been dealt.

From their vantage point, many Neocologists see the majority of Thyrsus mages as Luddites and anachronisms. These Neocologists insist that at this point, there is no going backward to a time without industry, there is only going forward to get to a point where humankind and nature are interdependent instead of mutually exclusive. The point is not to do without science, but to move forward as quickly as possible, with the help of magic, to get to *better* science that is less harmful to the physical and spiritual landscape.

Neocologists study the modern world, especially the shallow new spirits that have arisen from human works and the changes the modern world has inflicted on the spiritual landscape. What they see horrifies them, although the developments of the last few decades have shown them a new way for them to reclaim the world, through a magically assisted form of bioremediation.



Bio What?

Bioremediation is the practice of using life forms to reclaim areas that have been contaminated by pollution. Using particular plants to absorb and change pollutants is specifically called phytoremediation. Using fungi for such tasks is specifically called mycoremediation.

An example of the latter is using slime mold to decontaminate sites that have been contaminated with spilled diesel fuel. Damp sawdust and slime mold spores are scattered over the contaminated areas, and the mushroom mycelium consume the diesel fuel and degrade it into natural, harmless matter that is non-toxic and actually good for the environment instead of toxic.

Neocologists use a magically-enhanced, spiritually active form of bioremediation to reclaim areas that have been polluted and where the Realms Invisible have been corrupted by mortal stupidity.

Parent Path or Order: Thyrsus

Nickname: Reclaimers

Appearance: Neocologists are relentlessly modern in their appearance as they are in most things. Though many of them are ashamed of doing so, Neocologists force themselves to keep up with contemporary urban fashion, live in cities and take part in modern — even cutting-edge — culture. Between their smooth sophistication and high-end wardrobes, these mages can easily be mistaken for walkers on the Path of Scourging. That said, Neocologists use what they know about the Invisible Realms to help them live as lightly on the world as possible.

These mages are no more impervious to low Wisdom scores than any other mages, however, and when their Wisdom falls, they degrade socially in the same way that other Thyrsus mages do (see page XX), with their bestial natures eclipsing their higher functions.

Background: Those mages who have become Neocologists have all been raised in highly industrial nations where the natural world was quickly giving way to the relentless advance of an artificial and non-renewing landscape. These Shamans were too thoroughly indoctrinated in the ways of their culture by the time they made their journey to the Primal Wild. Though they returned with the wisdom of primordial magic, it doesn't erase all that they knew from before their Awakening. The first Neocologist cabal took shape in England at the height of the Industrial Revolution, but the Legacy has since spread both east and west, and members of this Legacy can be found in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas. Any Thyrsus mage who Awakens in surroundings where the human-made world is eclipsing the natural spiritual landscape might choose to take on this Legacy when his Gnosis gets high enough.

Organization: This Legacy has few enough members that most members still know each other personally; no more than two degrees of separation are between any two mages following this Legacy. A few mages of the Legacy's first cabal who are still alive, thanks to heavy use of Life magic, and they are considered the grandmasters of the Legacy. Neocologists have very little status with other Thyrsus mages who, for the most part, see Neocologists as sell-outs and assimilationists. Among others following this Legacy, status is determined by which members of the first cabal (or which of their students) one learned the Legacy from. The resulting organizational structure is something between an extended, multi-generational family and a lineage of scholars.

Suggested Oblations: Meditating on some aspect of modern existence — and the spiritual ramifications thereof, tending an urban garden, any act that bridges the natural and artificial worlds, tending some portion of nature within an urban environment or introducing non-destructive technology into a natural setting

Concepts: Ambassador between the spirit courts of the natural and artificial worlds, bioremediation engineer, keeper of balance, translator of old magic into new magic, techgnostic innovator

Attainments

The Attainments of the Neocologist Legacy grant the mage the ability to bridge the gap between the mechanized human-made world and the natural world. Unlike the vast majority of Attainments, these have not had generations of testing, and they're still prone to "bugs." The trick is to get just the right melding of spirit and vessel, but more than one Neocologist has combined spirits and vessels poorly to get unsatisfactory, or dangerous, results.

Barrier Breaking

Prerequisites: Gnosis 3, Spirit 2, Life 1

This Attainment functions as a combination of Spirit Tongue and Peer Across the Gauntlet (see **Mage: The Awakening** pp. 246–247), allowing the Neocologist to know exactly what the state of the spiritual landscape around him is. These mages effectively operate on both sides of the Gauntlet at will. They see spirits and spirits see them. This Attainment is always in effect and of Indefinite duration. For followers of this Legacy, viewing events taking place in the Shadow Realm is no more difficult than looking in the right direction.

Additionally, the mage also gains a particular awareness of the spirits of living beings. He senses the health of a scraggly tree in an urban blight zone and the vitality of a wolf that's

stalking him; he senses anomalies or overlapping of spiritual "signatures" if there are two spirits in one body (as in the case of an embryo or other parasites).

Spirit's Caress

Prerequisites: Gnosis 5, Spirit 3

At the most basic, this Attainment allows the Neocologist to direct a spirit to put its signature or its "charge" onto a physical object, even one that it normally wouldn't resonate with. A wolf spirit, for example, could touch the spirit of a domesticated dog to make it more aggressive, or make a car's spirit more aggressive (more likely to start or go fast, for example) for the duration of the spell. The mage should have some idea what effect the spirit she's toying with will have on the object or she could be in for some odd surprises. Natural spirits generally have several qualities they could confer, and the wrong one(s) could cause quite a headache for the mage.

Optional Arcanum: Life 3

By adding the Life Arcanum, the mage allows a living creature to physically take on some feature of the spirit touching it. A cat touched by the wolf spirit mentioned above would not only behave more "wolfishly," but would take on certain physical characteristics of a wolf as well. The creature affected would gain certain physical traits of the spirit as well. A person touched by a turtle spirit might become more resistant to harm (Armor 3), but at the expense of dropping his Speed by 3 (the human species factor divided by two and rounded down).

This Attainment would, among other things, allow a mage to turn another person into a berserker, by enhancing both his spirit and physical body for the duration of the effect.

Optional Arcanum: Matter 3

By adding the Matter Arcanum, the mage causes a physical object to take on features appropriate to the spirit that touched the item. A car touched by the wolf spirit, for example, might turn gray, grow sleeker, and change in subtle ways that might be seen as menacing.

Prerequisites: Gnosis 7, Spirit 4

The basic function of this Attainment allows a mage to bind a spirit into a physical object similar to the spell Create Fetish (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 252).

Optional Arcanum: Life 4

At its root, this Attainment is a cross between Spirit Guardian and Spirit Possession, attaching a spirit to a mortal form. The physical entity gains access to a range of the possessing spirits' abilities, but loses some modicum of control over its own body. Signs of the possessing spirit are *very* obvious in the creature so possessed. A human possessed by a bear spirit would be big and hairy and have features resembling a bear's. An animal imbued with a plant spirit would not need to eat, but it would turn green and be inactive at night, and so on.

Optional Arcanum: Matter 4

A mechanical object infused with an animal spirit will unmistakably have the look and feel of that spirit. A car with a lightning spirit bound to it will glow and give off sparks and shock anyone who touches it. A car with a plant spirit turns green and needs no gas by day, and so on.

Thyrsus Characters

Itinerant Exorcist

Quote: *Once I devour the spirit possessing your son, I believe the boy should be fine.*

Background: Shortly after she first Awakened, the Itinerant Exorcist saw a man possessed by a spirit of rage kill another man just for stealing a rice dumpling. For her, that event represents any occasion when the Realm Invisible meddles with the material realm. Her experiences since then have led her to believe that nothing good comes of spirits meddling where they don't belong, and that such meddling also violates the wishes of Heaven.

The Itinerant Exorcist wanders from town to town in rural areas, mostly in Asia, where she expels spirits from people, places and things where they should not be — for a price, of course.

Description: Even the incredible vitality of the Thyrsus Path is taxed by this lifestyle, and it shows. The Itinerant Exorcist has dark circles under her eyes and looks used up and, perhaps, a little bit mad. She really doesn't have time to focus on her clothes or her appearance, and even though she was once pretty, she now looks worn.

If she could take just one week off from this lifestyle, she might still recover relatively quickly, but her obsessive nature doesn't leave much hope for such an outcome. She's on a one-woman mission to free the world from meddling by the Shadow Realm.

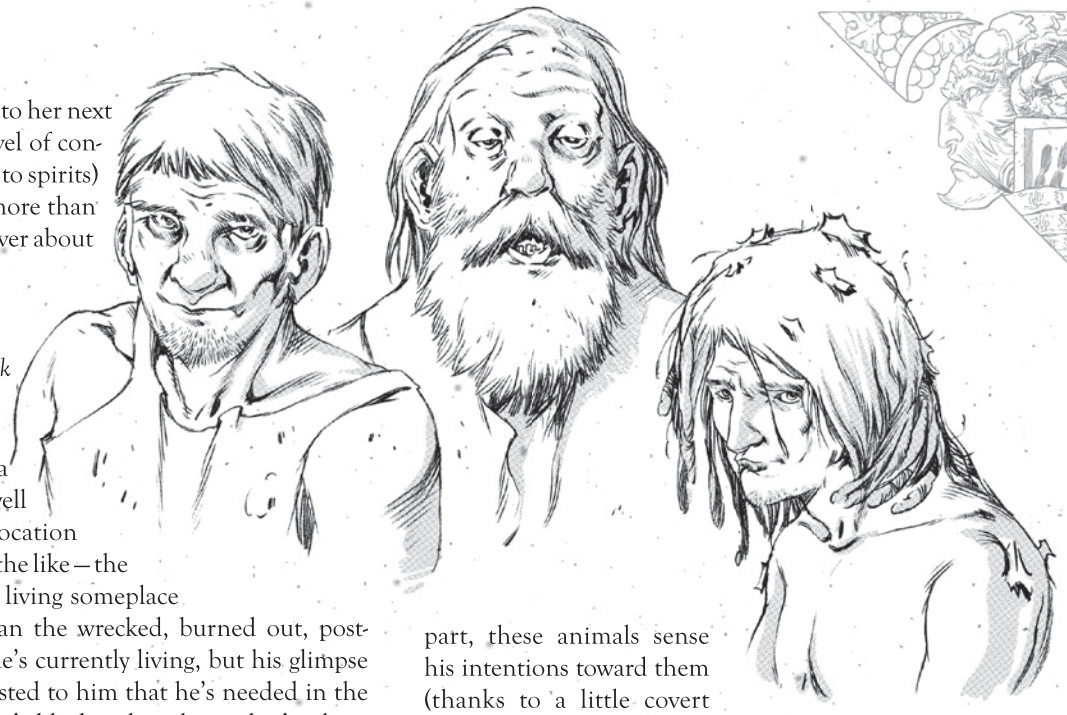
Storytelling Hints: The Itinerant Exorcist has a very thin and fragile mask of formality over what is a very feral nature. Sleepers aren't likely to ever see this mask slip, but spirits often bear the brunt of her fury after she's forced them from their involuntary vessels. There is very little she has not seen in her travels, and between that and her Thyrsus understanding of passions, she might come across as a little jaded.

Abilities:

Exorcism (dice pool 8) — The training and expertise of the Itinerant Exorcist has been very focused on her spirit skills, especially how to deal with wayward or invasive spirits. This is her calling and her role in the world.

Investigation (dice pool 7) — The Itinerant Exorcist stays aware of events in both the Realms Invisible and the material

realm that might lead her to her next "assignment," but this level of connection to the world (and to spirits) often leads her to learn more than she ever expected to discover about a range of subjects.



Urban Shaman

Quote: *There's a lot of work to do in this damned city, otherwise I'd be* long *gone.*

Background: From a middle-class family and well trained in a sensible vocation — electrician, plumber or the like — the Urban Shaman could be living someplace much more desirable than the wrecked, burned out, post-industrial ghetto where he's currently living, but his glimpse of the Primal Wild suggested to him that he's needed in the city, as a link in the chain's bleakest length, so that's where he stays.

Description: The Urban Shaman dresses on the rougher side of hip. Whatever the tough guys are wearing, he adapts it to his own style, and maybe includes an extra knife in his boot or a .357 tucked in his waistband. Magic's fine, but sometimes steel can be the best trick in the book.

Storytelling Hints: The Urban Shaman evinces the "survival of the fittest" ethic that Thyrsus mages pick up in the Primal Wild in spades; he just adapts the ethic to the concrete jungle. Consequently, he can go into even the roughest, most dangerous ghettos, and nobody messes with him.

That the packs of feral, mangy dogs that often plague these dangerous streets seem to watch out for him and turn up when he needs them most doesn't hurt. Even the rats seem to look out for him.

Underneath all the other layers, the masks, the defenses, the Urban Shaman sees himself as a martyr for the natural cause. He would much *rather* be out in the wilds with the pure spirits of wind and woodland instead of those of smog and concrete, but not all of Nature is pretty, and someone needs to monitor the toll being taken in the cities and, for the time being, it's still him.

Abilities:

Intimidation (dice pool 7) — The Urban Shaman takes the notion of the "concrete jungle" very seriously, and he survives it because he's the fittest, toughest and most dangerous predator there.

Bestial Alliances (dice pool 6) — The Urban Shaman trusts animals, even city animals, more than he trusts most people, and he takes care of them, including feeding them and healing their wounds, every time he has the opportunity. For their part, these animals sense his intentions toward them (thanks to a little covert magic), and they respond in kind. Consequently, the Urban Shaman has an odd little coterie of animals, from wild dogs and rats to pigeons, crows and feral cats, who look out for his well-being.

Streetwise (dice pool 9) — Nobody knows their way around the streets of his city better than the Urban Shaman. Between his own experience, Sleeper acquaintances and what gets overseen and overheard by the animals and spirits who serve him, he has the most complete picture of what's going down on the street of anyone in the city. This comes with a hefty discretion requirement: if he let slip one-tenth of what he knows about the local drug dealers, mobsters, politicians, vampires and secret societies, he'd be marked for a quick "accidental" death. Sometimes survival of the fittest really means "survival of the most discreet," and, as things now stand, nobody *does* realize just how much he knows; he just happens to be where he needs to be to do what he needs to do and nobody's the wiser.

Mato

Hardcore Modern Primitive

Quote: *If you felt the world the way I feel the world, you'd be just like me, doing exactly what I'm doing.*

Background: Tyler Davis was a bright, unassuming boy growing up in Provo, Utah. He had six siblings and was the middle child, but he was the one who stood out. He was handsome to the point of looking like an angel; when he graduated valedictorian of his class, his parents were very excited to have him go someplace interesting on his mission. Davis was a Mormon, and it was expected that he would go on a mission. His natural talent with languages gave him his pick of destinations, and he chose Rio de Janeiro. His family was thrilled for him.

But nothing had prepared Davis for being away from home. He was as sheltered as it's possible for a human to be. Even in the safest parts of the city, in the company of his missionary companion, Rio was overwhelming to Davis.

When Davis and his companion signed up for a tour of the jungle outside of Rio, he was terrified. Even more so when the bus was hijacked and taken *much* farther away from the city than planned.

At the moment of his greatest terror, Tyler Davis was transported to the Primal Wild, where none of the comforting tales of civilization held sway. Every last "thou shalt not" fell away there in the torrid jungle of the most savage Supernal Realm.

He knew what he had to do. The siren song of the Watchtower of the Stone Book called to him like an urgent sin, and, hearing predators in the verdant chaos behind him, he knew he had to climb. Adrenaline pushed him far beyond what he believed himself capable of. By the time he reached the top of the basalt pillar and entered the cave, his hands were bleeding and raw from the thorny vines, but he didn't feel pain. Instead, he was beset by arousal as he had never felt it. The air around him was a lover to him, and every breeze a shameless caress.

He wrote his soul's name in the Stone Book with the blood on his hands as something in his heart screamed out "YES!" to an unasked question.

Back on the hijacked bus, Davis returned to find his companion in prayer and the kidnappers laughing and playing cards. He thought only *free now*, turned into a falcon and escaped.

In the jungle, Davis found his true home. He made a name for himself as a healer to the native villagers in the jungle, and they provide him with all the food and sexual partners he asks for. It's a primitive barter system, but it works for him.

In recent years, Mato has begun wondering if he is the only mage in the world. Spirits have told him of Jivaro Shamans far to the west, and now that he feels he understands his abilities, he plans on seeking the other mages out. Only his steady supply of bedmates keeps him from going.

Description: Although Mato comes from lily-white Northern European stock, you'd never know it to look at him now. His fine blond hair has grown long, and, with a bit of help from magic, it's turned into dreadlocks. He occasionally puts on clothes and goes into a town for alcohol and sweets, but he generally stays in the jungle. When he's there, he wears very little to hide his supple, muscular body, although he'll sometimes use mud and leaf paste as a form of camouflage.

His nimbus manifests as a chill wind that, with his most powerful spells, seems to penetrate clothing and caress the skin directly.

Storytelling Hints: You know all the bourgeois rules of polite society, you just don't follow them. Nothing could be more antithetical to you now than the tedious, pious life of a missionary. You tend to think of yourself as a force of nature now. You're civil to mages, but arrogant to Sleepers. You don't want anyone moving in on your territory, but you don't want to seem overly hostile, either. If others don't understand your passions, that's their problem. You're not obligated to explain anything.

Real Name: Tyler Davis
Path: Thyrsus
Order: None (Apostate)
Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 4
Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5
Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 3
Mental Skills: Academics 2, Crafts (Weaving) 4, Investigation 2, Medicine 3, Occult 1
Physical Skills: Athletics (Climbing) 4, Brawl 3, Stealth 4, Survival (Jungle) 4
Social Skills: Animal Ken 4, Empathy 2, Expression 2, Intimidation 4, Subterfuge 2
Merits: Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Dream 5, Familiar 4, Feral Mien, Hallow 3, Holistic Awareness, Iron Stomach, Language (Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese), Natural Immunity, Striking Looks 2, Strong Lungs, Toxin Resistance
Willpower: 7
Wisdom: 5
Virtue: Fortitude
Vice: Lust
Initiative: 7
Defense: 4
Speed: 12
Health: 10
Gnosis: 4
Arcana: Fate 3, Life 3, Spirit 3
Rotes: *Fate* — Shifting the Odds (••), Superlative Luck (•••); *Life* — Cleanse the Body (•), Control Base Life (••), Control Median Life (•••), Heal Flora and Fauna (••), Healer's Trance (•), Healing Heart (•••), Honing the Form (•••), Organic Resilience (••), Self Healing (••), Self Purging (••), Transform Self (•••); *Spirit* — Control Spirit (•••), Spirit Tongue (•), Ephemeral Shield (••), Exorcism (•••)
Mana/per turn: 13/4
Armor: 3 (Ephemeral Shield, Spirit •••)